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ABSTRACT

Based on an Oregon pilot project to explore alternatives to court termination of parental rights, the four Parent Empowerment workbooks and the Practice Manual which make up this set are intended to help caseworkers or mediators assist parents in self-examination and decision making, allowing the parents to consider both parenting and adoption options in a non-coercive atmosphere. The workbooks are designed to empower parents by providing appropriate choices individually tailored to their needs by the caseworker. The workbooks may also help caseworkers and mediators design cooperative adoptions with parents. Workbook 1, "A Child's Needs," addresses the child's needs including where they have been, people that make a difference, what is important to the child, what gives the child strength, the child's needs, and benefits of cooperative. Workbook 2, "Looking at Options," looks at options including parenting, adoption, child's needs, involving the family, children with special needs, considering choices, and thinking about loss. Workbook 3, "A Cooperative Adoption," addresses cooperative adoption including openness, choosing parents, meeting parents, planning the agreement, contact before placement, and the adoption agreement. Workbook 4, "Letting Go," addresses letting go, including plans and goals, visits, transitions, good-bye ceremonies, grief, loss, healing, and new relationships. The Practice Manual presents a process that works in establishing openness in a wide variety of adoptions. The manual includes suggestions for professionals, ideas for transitions, and additional questions that might help clients. (Contains 39 references.) (SD)

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Mediating Permanency Outcomes

PRACTICE MANUAL

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Jeanne Etter

Mediating Permanency Outcomes

PRACTICE MANUAL

Jeanne Etter
Illustrations by Tom Tierney
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Introduction

Whether you work in a child welfare system or simply care about children who are suffering, you know that today's families are breaking down faster than our systems can cope. Nationwide, six out of every 1,000 children under the age of 18 are in out-of-home care. Neglected and abused children are trapped in a permanency bottleneck that keeps them from being reunited with their families or placed in permanent adoptive homes. Children in care who can't return home are too often left in limbo until the laborious and painful process of legal termination of their parents' rights frees them for adoption.

Mediating Permanency Outcomes is based on a pilot project initiated by Oregon's Children's Services Division, together with Adoption Teamwork of Oregon, to explore alternatives to court termination of parental rights. The project was funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It is intended for use with parents whose prognosis for reunification with their children is poor. Using these materials, caseworkers and mediators can engage parents in cooperative planning for their children's futures. Even neglectful and abusive parents can be empowered to work cooperatively on plans for their children's futures.

The Parent Empowerment Workbooks

The four *Parent Empowerment Workbooks* that, along with the *Practice Manual*, make up *Mediating Permanency Outcomes* can help caseworkers or mediators assist parents in self-examination and decision making, allowing the parents to consider both parenting and adoption options in a noncoercive atmosphere. The workbooks are designed to empower parents by providing appropriate choices individually tailored to their needs by the caseworker.

The *Parent Empowerment Workbooks* may also help caseworkers and mediators design cooperative adoptions with parents. Our goal is to enable parents and professionals to face issues courageously, make good decisions about the children's futures, and, when appropriate, plan adoptions that will serve the needs of all parties to the adoption.

The involvement of a neutral professional as a mediator may facilitate cooperative planning between the parent and the state's child protective services. Private sector child welfare mediators may be able to help parents, family members, caseworkers, attorneys, and foster or adoptive parents (when appropriate) plan for adoption or return home together, yet within the child welfare structure.

The Practice Manual

The *Practice Manual* portion of *Mediating Permanency Outcomes* is based on several assumptions. The caseworkers and mediators who use these materials must

- have experience in working with the most difficult clients in the child welfare system and have knowledge of basic family unity and mediation principles (Users will also need to have training in the step-by-step process of creating mediated cooperative adoptions.);
- be interested in working cooperatively with the most difficult parents and families;
- believe in empowering parents and families to participate in decisions about their children's future whenever possible;
- believe that the best interests of the child cannot be isolated from the child's family's needs—including those of the birth, foster, and adoptive families; and
- believe that an ongoing connection with the family of origin is invaluable to a special-needs child growing up in a new home. A growing body of research and literature attests to the fundamental need of adoptees for connections with their roots in their birth families.

Disagreement on openness in adoption comes most often when professionals prescribe *how* the connection should occur. To reduce disagreements, this *Manual* presents a process that works in establishing openness in a wide variety of adoptions. Every detail is deliberately not spelled out because no two adoptions are the same. Rather, we talk about caseworkers setting parameters and leave the details to the good judg-

ment of the worker. Through training and experience, workers gain an appreciation of what choices may be appropriate for which clients.

The four *Parent Empowerment Workbooks* that are the core of *Mediating Permanency Outcomes* are reproduced in a reduced format in this *Practice Manual*. Case workers and mediators should use this *Practice Manual* to read stories and questions out loud with their clients. The *Practice Manual* also includes suggestions for professionals, ideas for transitions, and additional questions that might help clients.

Before You Begin

Before the *Parent Empowerment Workbooks* are used with a parent whose child is in care, the following should occur:

- Joint review of the file with earlier caseworkers;
- Resolution of Indian Child Welfare Act questions;
- Review of visiting arrangements;
- Review of service agreements (Refine with three or four important items.);
- transitional visit with the parent and both caseworkers (for transferred cases);
- Clarification of the legal rights of family members;
- Establishment of communication with the parent's attorney;
- Brief interviews with neighbors, counselors, group leaders, and/or foster parents (to determine the parent's progress); and
- Review with the parent and important family members of goals, options, and past events. Emphasis should be placed on the ability of family members to make decisions about the present, even though they can't change the past. Family members should be clear as to what needs improvement and what will happen if the parent does not make progress or doesn't plan cooperatively.

In these materials, the term *parent* refers to a child's birth or biological parent, and the terms *adoptive parent* and *foster parent* refer to those individuals other than the child's birth parent who are or will be caring for the child. Although the materials use the singular when referring to the child's parent, they are intended for use with either one or both of the child's parents.

Using These Materials

1. ***Emphasize choices.*** Thinking and talking about choices makes it easier for parents to recognize their ability or lack of ability to parent. Having choices helps parents move on to making plans for their children's futures.

2. ***Use your best judgment in selecting which subjects you will cover.*** Tailor the lessons to the parents' needs.

3. ***Help the child by helping the family.*** The child's best hope lies in building on the strengths of his or her parents and family (no matter how minimal the strengths seem), offering the parents and family the chance to make good choices (no matter how small), and giving the child and family the chance to stay connected.

4. ***Use the workbooks together.*** While the workbooks belong to the parents, you may want to keep them in your office to ensure that the process is not disrupted. Read the stories together, usually out loud, and discuss each story before going on to the questions. Doing so helps focus the meeting and allows the parents to think about the issues involved in each story.

5. ***Give the stories a chance to work.*** Some workers feel embarrassed to read the stories out loud with clients. Parents enjoy them, however, and open up in response to their simplicity, rather than feeling insulted by them.

6. ***Ask the parent for help.*** Request the parents' assistance in evaluating the effectiveness of the stories and questions. Encourage parents to step outside of themselves by focusing on the needs of others for help with particular issues. Later, use these skills to help the parents think about their children's needs.

7. ***Track ideas and insights.*** If parents are unwilling to take notes following the questions, you will need to take them yourself. Use additional pages if necessary. Make a photocopy of the story and notes for the parents at the end of the session to take home for reference between meetings.

8. ***Move speedily toward achieving permanency for the child.*** Use the *Parent Empowerment Workbooks* both consistently and frequently. Meeting once a week (or at least once every two weeks) helps the parents proceed at a steady pace and benefit quickly from the materials. Once a direction begins to take shape, move rapidly toward it, even if it means doing several lessons at a session. If time is too limited to move forward quickly, enlist the assistance of a culturally appropriate mediator.

9. ***Don't confuse voluntary and involuntary participation.*** Parents typically enter the child protective services system involuntarily and can have their parental rights terminated involuntarily. Their participation in this program, however, is voluntary. Parents are not legally obligated to come in or to work on any plans. Since parents have the choice to be at meetings or not (as in any mediation process), treating their participation with respect and appreciation improves the chances for a positive planning process. The parents' presence itself demonstrates a certain level of caring for their children.

10. ***Be flexible.*** Begin where the parents are. For some parents, reading together out loud may be too basic. At the outset, discover what issues are most important to the parents as they work toward making realistic choices about their children's futures.

11. ***Open each subject in a neutral manner.*** The stories allow the opening of a discussion about each issue at arm's length. This leads naturally to increasingly personal questions and discussion regarding the parents' circumstances. The objective is not to have the parents identify personally with characters in the stories. Rather, the stories allow the parents insight into the decisions made by others, and allow the worker insight into the parents' thinking.

12. ***Assess parental hostility before starting.*** Parents who are furious about being in the same room with the caseworker are not good candidates for this program, but may be appropriately referred to a mediator. Parents who are hostile and defensive, however, may still do well in this program if the discussion remains focused on the people in the stories and away from personal questions at first.

13. ***Assess parental trust before starting.*** The first story focuses on a parent who has learned to trust her counselor and who reveals feelings about her early life. Skip this first story if the parent has difficulty trusting you or others. Return to it later if appropriate.

14. ***Prepare yourself and the parents for each session.*** Mention or outline the current issue at the beginning of the lesson to help prepare the parents. Discussing how the issue relates to making good choices in planning for their children's future helps parents be open and involved. Reviewing what has happened with a character in an earlier version of a story helps parents sees the various stages of the planning process.

15. ***Paint a picture for the parents.*** When shown a graphic illustration of a concept, parents have an additional avenue to understanding. Use the illustrations that accompany each story to determine if the parents relate the issue to their own life experiences or to the experiences of their children.

16. ***Provide a transition from the story to the questions.*** Finding your own way to make the transition is important. If making transitions seems awkward at first, try saying, "Have you known anybody like this? What do you think about what she did?" Use your judgment about how long to talk about other people before moving to questions about the parent.

17. ***Tailor the lesson to the individual.*** For example, when working with a father who is antagonistic to women, start with Issue 3 or skip the stories and use only the questions. If a parent doesn't understand the questions at first, try selecting one question and explaining it carefully.

18. ***Follow the principles of the Oregon Family Unity Model*** (p. 73). Work with the parents as partners, building on the parents' strengths, emphasizing choices, and reframing troublesome areas as positively as you can. Respect parents' ability to plan for their children's future.

19. ***Involve important family members.*** While the parent is the major focus of attention, other family members may have equal or greater impact on decisions made regarding the child's future. Many cultures do not emphasize independent thinking and decision making the way the dominant culture does.

20. ***Update parents often on their children's needs.*** When parents visit with their children, they only get a partial picture of their children's experiences and needs. Parents who are given details are in a better position to plan appropriately for their children's futures. Connect the children's needs and the current lesson to give relevance to the issue.

21. ***Pay careful attention to the family situation.*** The family will respect your position more if you have taken the time to understand their situation in depth. Reviewing the case thoroughly, visiting the home often, and seeking family input are all ways of building a

sense in the parents that you are working in the family's best interest. Consider doing lessons in the parents' homes or with other family members. (Consider this only with parents where safety is not an issue.)

22. ***Do not leave issues unresolved.*** The ability to listen to and support parents' choices can be influenced by unresolved issues. We all have baggage from our past, whether it be a major loss or an inability to cry when we are sad. Being realistic about what you can and can't handle is extremely beneficial to you and your clients.

23. ***Get help rather than moving forward if things go wrong.*** You can do a better job if you don't expect yourself to handle every single parent on every single issue. If you are in a situation where help is warranted, stop the process, and consult with others. Seek help if:

    - You are afraid to be in the same room as the parent.
    - You find yourself disliking the parent and can find nothing positive on which to focus or to nurture.
    - You have trouble dealing with the parent's emotions.
    - You feel the parent has no right to be involved in planning for the child's future.
    - You believe cooperation with the parent will be impossible.
    - You believe there should be no continued connection between the parent and the child.

24. ***Keep others informed of the parent's progress in considering options for the child's future.*** To keep communication lines open, contact the parent's attorney before you start this program and invite the attorney to come to lessons, if he or she wishes. Let the foster parents know what the parent is working on and give the foster parents copies of the *Parent Empowerment Workbooks* to read and think about. Letting other family members know, with the parent's permission, that you and the parent are considering options can ease tensions and create support.

25. ***Be clear about the reasons for and the process involved in cooperative adoption planning.*** To ensure a successful planning process, especially if some part of the process is unclear to you, discuss it with a consultant for clarification prior to developing any plans.

26. ***Base the adoption plan on the child's needs.*** A cooperative adoption is not a bargaining tool. A good agreement stems from the best interests of the child, who needs a continuing connection to the birth family's love in the years ahead.

27. ***Follow principles of mediation.*** Create a permanency plan that is based on respect for each person's ability to make good choices after he or she is fully informed. Remember that written agreements should affirm the parties' choices and help them maintain the cooperative relationships they have chosen.

MEDIATING PERMANENCY OUTCOMES: PARENT EMPOWERMENT WORKBOOKS

A Child's Needs

WORKBOOK 1

Jeanne Etter

Contents

Issue 1. Where I Have Been 4

Shayla has a daughter in foster care and a baby boy with her.

Issue 2. People Make a Difference 6

Francesca has two girls in foster care and lives with Ricardo, her boyfriend.

Issue 3. What Is Important to Me 8

Nick has two children in foster care. His wife, Lisa, is in treatment.

Issue 4. What Gives Me Strength 10

Sheri has one boy in foster care.

Issue 5. My Child's Needs 12

Loni has two children in foster care and a baby boy with her.

Issue 6. Benefits of Cooperation 14

Yvonne and Terrell have four children in foster care.

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Issue 1

PRACTICE TIPS

1. Provide a transition from the last caseworker. Explain the seriousness of the situation and the need for the parent to make concrete plans for his child's future.

2. Introduce the workbook. Let the parent know this is a way he can think about his own life and plan for his child's life.

3. Read the first story together, out loud, if appropriate. Ask the parent what he thinks about the person in the story.

4. Introduce the questions. As you talk, encourage the parent by saying, "I'd like to listen to your thoughts about _____." Then listen without interrupting.

5. Say "I'd like to listen to you tell about _____ again." Have the parent go over particular parts until his perception or mood changes, if possible.

6. If the parent begins laughing, crying, yawning, or sharing, encourage him to continue by stating that these are normal forms of release that help people to feel better.

7. Balance heaviness with lightness. If the parent is overcome with painful feelings, help him talk about something light and in the present.

8. Let the parent control the painful memories he wishes to discuss. This is not therapy.

9. If you see connections between what the parent is saying and his present problems, say nothing for now. He will make his own connections later on.

10. Do not judge or give your opinions. Provide only your caring attention.

11. Since the stories are intended to introduce issues, not to relate to the parent's story, let the parent say what he thinks of the characters, and then tell you *his* story.

12. Remember to use stories that relate to the parent. Skip those parts of the booklets that seem less helpful.

13. Affirm the ability of the parent to make good decisions for his child.

Where I Have Been

ISSUE 1

Shayla's daughter was in foster care, and her baby boy was with her. She and her counselor were talking about what children need. It was hard for Shayla to understand a child's needs because she didn't get what she needed as a child.

"Maybe some parents don't mean it when they say 'I wish you'd never been born,' but mine did," said Shayla. "My grandmother loved me, but nobody else did."

After she grew to trust her counselor, Shayla told her how sad and confused she was growing up. After her parents divorced, her mother's boyfriends lived with them. Shayla was afraid of the ones who abused her. That made it hard to trust anyone now.

Shayla said, "I'm glad I have a counselor now that I can trust, one who really listens to me. Crying makes me feel better. Sometimes I think I have so much pain and hatred inside I could cry forever. Listening to my kids whine or cry makes me crazy. I hope I can keep them from going through what I had to go through."

My Childhood:

Discuss the story together.

1

14. Empower the parent. Give him choices and an understanding of the things he is in charge of.

15. If the parent can jot down answers to questions in his workbook, encourage him to do so. If not, write for him.

16. Copy useful parts of the workbooks for the parent to take. Keep the original booklet in a safe place.

Your Story

What would you have changed about your own childhood?

_____

_____

_____

What did you feel best about in your own childhood?

_____

_____

_____

What is your earliest memory?

_____

_____

_____

What is your worst memory?

_____

_____

_____

What do you think your child's story might be like?

_____

_____

_____

5

YOUR IDEAS

DON'T FORGET

- ✓ Listening well is your main job.
- ✓ Talking helps parents.
- ✓ Crying helps parents.
- ✓ Read the books together.
- ✓ Be comfortable and close.
- ✓ Be uninterrupted.
- ✓ Let parents draw conclusions, not you.
- ✓ See the best in parents and be delighted.
- ✓ Good questions may bring emotional reactions.
- ✓ Answers don't matter. Relationships do.

Issue 2

PRACTICE TIPS

1. Consider both parents as part of the process from the beginning.

2. Help the parent identify important people from the past and the present.

3. Ask for the parent's reactions to Francesca's story and listen to her beliefs about relationships.

4. Behaviors and beliefs tend to be closely aligned. Think about how you can work *with* the parent on a plan for her child from the place she is now.

5. Help the parent understand the influence of the different people in her life.

6. Allow the parent to experience her feelings as you talk.

7. Don't be as emotional as the parent, but do model having feelings when you hear about her pain.

8. Avoid judging the people that the parent discusses. Maintain a mental attitude that allows the parent to share these difficult things.

9. Start gathering photos and stories for the child. The central issue for a child separated from her parents is identity. Ask for photos from parents, foster parents, grandparents, friends, and significant others

10. Say to the parent, "Photos mean a great deal to a child who has changed homes. I hope you'll share copies of photos from when she was with you. If you don't have extras, I will make copies and give the originals back to you."

11. Start gathering information for a Life Story Book that can help the child come to terms with the past and prepare for the future. Use a binder with plastic sleeves. Put photos, notes, and stories inside plastic page protectors until someone can assemble the Life Story Book.

12. Families are the best information resource. Be alert for clues about who could help. Ask questions about different relatives.

People Make a Difference

ISSUE 2

Ricardo, Francesca's new boyfriend, seemed like the most important person in her life, even more important than her children.

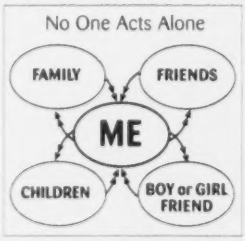
Francesca thought back to her early years. She could see that men had always controlled her, especially her uncle who had raised her. She was terrified of him. He got angry with her more often than with her cousins.

When Francesca came to this country, she had brothers and a boss at work telling her what to do. Her boyfriends always seemed to end up pushing her around and treating her badly. "My aunts and sisters, too, always tell me everything they think I am doing wrong and how awful I am."

Francesca began to change the way she felt about herself in her group for mothers of sexually abused children. She learned that only she could help what was happening in her life and her children's lives.

She told her caseworker, "I want people to stop saying wrong things about me. I wish I could put what I think is best before what my family and Ricardo say."

Discuss the story together.



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6

13. Make a list of all the people who care about the parent and the child.

14. Contact everyone who is involved in what happens in the child's future. Talk with each one about how you and the parent are working on a plan for the child. Let them know of the options being considered. Bring up the issue of having a new family raise the child.

YOUR IDEAS

Your Story

Who is the biggest help to you now?

_____

_____

_____

Who gives you the hardest time?

_____

_____

_____

Who was the biggest help to you as a child?
The biggest problem?

_____

_____

_____

Who influences you now on decisions you are making?
Is that influence good or bad?

_____

_____

_____

What support would you like to have?

_____

_____

_____

7

DON'T FORGET

- ✓ Help the parent identify important people.
- ✓ Look at the past and present.
- ✓ Who helps the parent?
- ✓ Who hurts the parent?
- ✓ Family ties affect a child's identity.
- ✓ Families can be great resources.
- ✓ Families help shape decisions.
- ✓ Talk to all important players.
- ✓ Build a team that can work together.

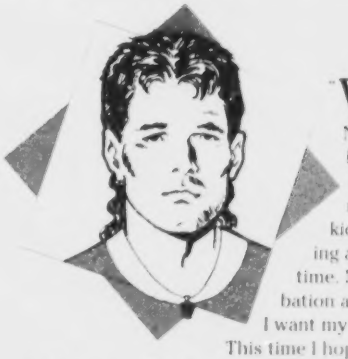
Issue 3

PRACTICE TIPS

1. Help the parent focus on what is important to him, to defuse hostility.
2. Anger and hostility can come from a variety of frustrating situations.
3. Sometimes resistance comes from a clash of cultures.
4. Normalize hostility by first allowing the parent to vent his anger. Listen with quiet curiosity.
5. Be clear that you don't blame the parent for his anger.
6. Be surprised that the parent isn't more angry for the amount of interference in his life.
7. When the parent calms down a little, admire his "fierce independence." Ask the parent if he's always been this independent.
8. Learn about the parent's goals and what he cares about.
9. Try to get useful information by listening and noticing what the parent cares about. Avoid getting bogged down in complaints or answering back.
10. Refer to the object of the parent's anger as "they" to distance yourself.
11. Give the parent physical space to move around.
12. Stand up and move near the door if you begin to feel the parent is losing control of his anger. *Get help if you feel threatened.*
13. Have a clear idea of the process of which you are in charge. Your goal is to get the parent to identify what he cares about most.

What Is Important to Me

ISSUE 3



"We've never been a real family," Nick said. "Lisa and I had our first baby before we got married. We were just kids, into drugs, thinking about having a good time. Now that I'm off probation and out of treatment, I want my family back together. This time I hope Lisa will come back home and make her treatment work like I have."

Nick's caseworker told him that things were serious. He could lose the children permanently since it had been almost a year and nothing had improved. The agency's goal was to see the children return home. The decision was in Nick and Lisa's hands.

Nick said, "What's most important in my life is getting my wife and kids back. But Lisa might not make it. If she doesn't, I don't think I have what it takes to be a single father on my own."

"I guess what I want most is a chance to have a good life. That's what I want for my kids, too. I guess I want to think about raising them myself—but only if I can do right by my kids."

Discuss the story together.

I Care About:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

8

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

14. Bad process leads to bad results. Don't get permanently sidetracked by venting. Come back to the issue and say you'll work on the questions together next time.

15. Use only the number of questions that the parent can reasonably deal with.

16. Take note of what works with the parent. Notes will help you avoid the things that did not work and build on those that did.

YOUR IDEAS

Your Story

What things do you care about most?

_____

_____

_____

What would you like most in your life five years from now?

_____

_____

_____

How is your life now different from what you hope for the future?

_____

_____

_____

What choices have led you to where you are now?

_____

_____

_____

What choices might make your future what you want?

_____

_____

_____

9

DON'T FORGET

- ✓ Normalize the parent's anger.
- ✓ Reframe hostility as fierce independence.
- ✓ Distance yourself from the target.
- ✓ Give the parent space to move.
- ✓ Get help if you feel threatened.
- ✓ Let the parent set the pace.
- ✓ After briefly allowing the parent to vent, move on.
- ✓ Keep the process clear.
- ✓ Use short sessions frequently.
- ✓ Stop or get help if you get confused.

10

Issue 4

PRACTICE TIPS

1. Realize that what people believe affects both how they feel and how they act.

2. Open the subject about what gives the parent strength.

3. Listen and take notes about the parent's view of the world.

4. Find out if fear of punishment has shaped her world.

5. Point out to the parent that constructing solutions is easier than dissolving problems.

6. Look for what the parent is doing right, even if it is the exception to her general behavior.

7. Help the parent find her strengths.

8. Point out to the parent the times when her child was able to return home, times she left a bad situation, or times she completed a program.

9. Exceptions are the key to finding solutions.

10. Parents are most hopeful when they can review their own success. Focus on one or two simple things the parent can do to create new successes by building on her previous successes.

11. Once you help the parent notice her successes, discuss ways for her to repeat the successful behavior patterns.

12. Notice and reinforce these exceptions in the parent's own life.

13. Wonder aloud about how the parent was able to achieve the success, so she can examine in detail the steps that she took.

14. Try questions like:

    - "How did you find the strength to say no to your mother?"
    - "How did you find the strength to get out of that relationship?"
    - "How have you managed to keep going through all of this?"
    - "What might you need to do to feel positive about yourself?"
    - "Can you make a commitment to something that makes you feel stronger?"

What Gives Me Strength

ISSUE 4

When things were at their worst, Sheri felt she couldn't bear to keep on living. Every morning she woke up terrified of facing her life. Sometimes she couldn't think straight. Everything she tried to do was an effort.

Sheri told her caseworker about the bad times in her life. People didn't ask Sheri about her faith very often, but when they did, she liked it. She was afraid that maybe God was punishing her by not giving her a decent father for her child and a happy family life.

Sheri said that when she felt at her worst, sometimes she thought that God really did love her. Often that small feeling of love gave her courage to go on.

She got strength from the idea that what happened to a person wasn't what mattered. It was what they did about it.

Sheri said she was going to use all the help she could get from her faith to make better choices in her life.

Discuss the story together.

I Turn To:

- ❑ God
- ❑ People who love me
- ❑ Myself
- ❑ A Higher Power
- ❑ Excitement
- ❑ Escape

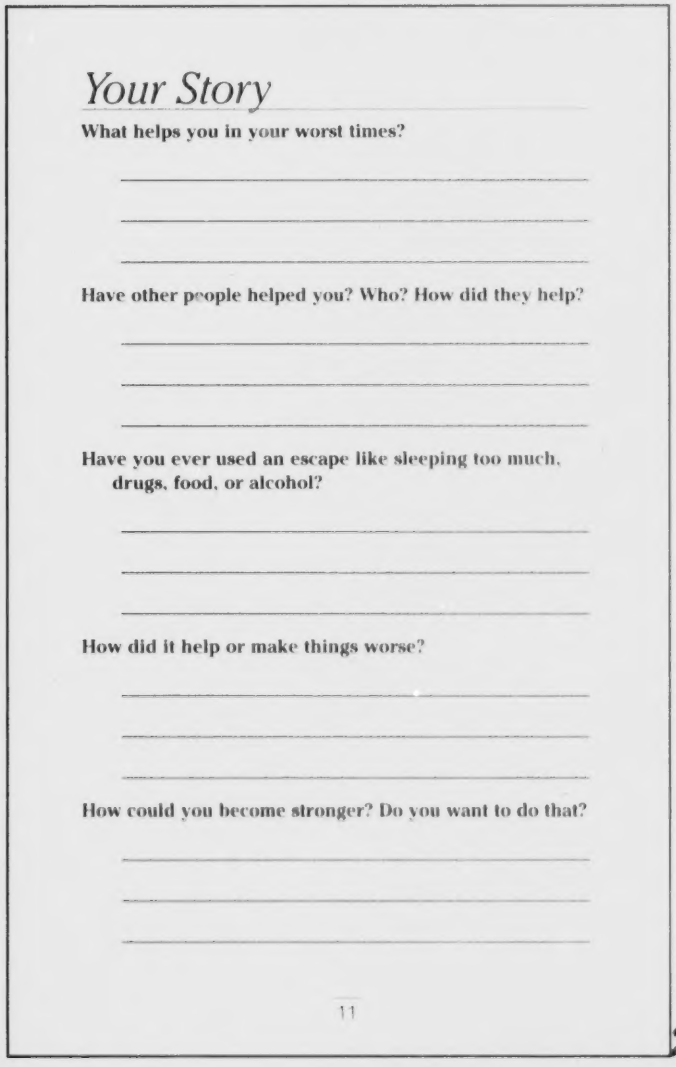
20

10

15. Frame for the parent how people who are helpful can continue to be an important part of her life, while she has the option to avoid people who are not helpful.

16. People who make things worse and who cannot be avoided should be brought into the program so their strengths can be built upon.

YOUR IDEAS



Your Story

What helps you in your worst times?

Have other people helped you? Who? How did they help?

Have you ever used an escape like sleeping too much, drugs, food, or alcohol?

How did it help or make things worse?

How could you become stronger? Do you want to do that?

11

DON'T FORGET

- ✓ Ask the parent if she ever felt like Sheri.
- ✓ Focus on solutions, not problems.
- ✓ Ask about successes.
- ✓ Problem solve with the parent.
- ✓ Help uncover what strengthens the parent.
- ✓ Build on exceptions to the problems.
- ✓ Draw out religious beliefs.
- ✓ Acknowledge that beliefs make a difference and that strengthening faith is possible.

Issue 5

PRACTICE TIPS

1. From the beginning, ask the parent to talk about how he came to this point. Say, "Tell me about it," or "Tell me what that was like for you."

2. Begin focusing on the child's needs by having the parent tell the child's story.

3. Be a good listener. Show you care about what happened to the parent.

4. Appreciate sharing. Avoid judging the parent.

5. Look for something to compliment in how the parent managed to keep going.

6. Identify times when the parent showed an understanding of his child's needs.

7. Reframe negatives about the child with positive words.

8. Let the parent have time to talk about and express his emotions about bad times.

9. Point out that children have bad times and unhappy feelings to express, too.

10. Counteract denial by asking for many details about the child's life and experiences.

11. Note and remember comments about having wanted an abortion or adoption.

12. After the story of the child's life has been told, make a list of the child's needs.

13. In all discussions of the child's needs, be concrete.

14. If the parent denies the child's pain, be concrete and detailed but not judgmental.

15. Notice whether the parent forgets the child's problems shortly after discussing them.

16. Acknowledge that some parents may never be able to face the reality that they have hurt their children, but that this does not mean they don't care about the children.

My Child's Needs

ISSUE 5

Loni held her baby on her lap and looked down at him with sadness. He had been in shelter care over the weekend while she was in jail. Her two other children had been in foster care for six months.

Loni told her caseworker she had left a party stoned and was picked up for shoplifting and leaving her baby alone in the car. She couldn't remember anything about the party except that her sisters and friends had brought their children too.

"Drinking and drugs is just something everybody I know does," Loni said. She had tried different treatment programs, but each time she went back to her old life afterward.

Even sober, Loni didn't know how to handle all three kids. Teachers told her they were delayed in speaking and motor skills. She knew they were having a hard life.

Loni told her caseworker each child's story, beginning with when she got pregnant. She made a list of what each child would need to have a good life. She could see that it was going to take a lot to help them with their problems.

My Child's Life:

Discuss the story together.

22

12

17. The parent's inability to see his child as a separate person does not mean he doesn't care about the child.

18. On every possible occasion, validate the parent's love and care for the child. Inability to parent does not mean inability to care.

YOUR IDEAS

Your Story

Tell the story of your child's life.

_____

_____

_____

How did you feel about your child before he or she was born?

_____

_____

_____

What needs did your child have after birth that were hard for you to handle?

_____

_____

_____

What are your child's biggest needs now?

_____

_____

_____

What would help your child's life the most?

_____

_____

_____

13

23

DON'T FORGET

- ✓ Draw out the child's story.
- ✓ Stress the child's need for permanency.
- ✓ Compliment the positive.
- ✓ Validate the parent's caring.
- ✓ Place importance on the parent's prebirth feelings.
- ✓ Remember that beliefs affect actions.
- ✓ List each child's needs.
- ✓ Be concrete.
- ✓ Be realistic about abilities.

Issue 6

PRACTICE TIPS

1. Assess and set aside your personal feelings about the parent.
2. Be interested and caring without being invested in the outcome.
3. Join the parent in problem solving by speaking in simple, everyday terms.
4. Use friendly, positive words.
5. Whenever possible, avoid words that make parents defensive.
6. Act and speak respectfully no matter what the parent says or does.
7. Begin the problem-solving process with cooperation between you and the parent.
8. Make cooperating with you feel good for the parent.
9. Talk over the benefits of cooperation in other areas.
10. Talk about strong and weak areas that the parent is aware of. Use examples from your own experience. For example, say: "I don't know how to repair cars but I still feel okay about myself."
11. Compare parenting to other skills. "Not everyone is good at being a parent. It doesn't mean you aren't a good person if parenting is not your strong point."
12. Discuss the difference between working together to plan for the child versus fighting over the child's future.
13. List the things the parent will lose and gain if she fights.
14. List the things the parent will lose and gain if she cooperates.
15. Get specific about termination trials. The parent may have found the legal system to be toothless up to now.
16. Go over what the parent values most and how she can get what she wants.
17. Set the stage for using the next workbook, *Looking at Options*, to help decision making.

Benefits of Cooperation

ISSUE 6

Terrell and Yvonne's four children were moved to foster care almost a year ago. They were angry for months about the kids being taken away. They thought having to take parenting classes was a waste of time.

Things got better with the new caseworker when they started talking about how they felt instead of yelling. Now they agreed that the kids should not have been left alone or beaten.

They said that their oldest girl, Kenya, was really attached to them and needed to be at home. But the three younger ones needed more attention and patience than they had to give.

"I feel sad to think I'm not very good at being a mother," Yvonne said. "I really do want to do the best job I can. I like the idea of planning a future for each child now instead of fighting with the state over them. I want our lives and theirs to get better, not worse."

Discuss the story together.

Fight

or

Pull Together

14

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18. Be flexible about using the workbooks and the lessons.

19. Emphasize choices even when realistic options seem limited.

20. Paint a picture for the parent of choices and the future so she understands her options at a gut level.

21. Use attentive listening to support the parent as she faces the future.

Your Story

What are some things you are good at?

_____

_____

_____

What are some things you aren't good at?

_____

_____

_____

What are your strengths and weaknesses as a parent?

_____

_____

_____

What could you gain or lose if you fight the state over your child's future?

_____

_____

_____

What could you gain or lose if you plan together?

_____

_____

_____

15

YOUR IDEAS

DON'T FORGET

- ✓ Join the parent in problem solving.
- ✓ Demonstrate cooperation.
- ✓ Use simple, respectful language.
- ✓ Make cooperating feel good.
- ✓ Gently look at the parent's strengths and weaknesses.
- ✓ Compare parenting to other skills.
- ✓ Talk about the parent's values.
- ✓ Be specific about the results of fighting.
- ✓ Paint a realistic picture of termination trials.

MEDIATING PERMANENCY OUTCOMES: PARENT EMPOWERMENT WORKBOOKS

Looking at Options

WORKBOOK 2

Jeanne Etter

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Issue 7

PRACTICE TIPS

1. Prepare the parent (see *Workbook 1: A Child's Needs*) to think about parenting as an option, not a requirement. After parenting attempts have failed, the parent may be ready to question his ability to parent.

2. Empower the parent by accepting that he can decide what is best for him and his family.

3. Accept that the parent *can* solve problems.

4. Make parenting seem like a choice by discussing other people who have chosen someone else to raise their children.

5. Explain how common beliefs only make it seem that a mother or father must be the one to raise the child.

6. Allow the parent to decide for himself whether parenting makes sense.

7. Remind the parent that his lack of success at parenting does not mean he is a failure as a person.

8. Draw out the parent's beliefs about parenting as a choice. Build on examples where the parent can see there was a real choice.

9. Ask hard questions about how the parent can support his child.

10. Talk about how the parent has managed jobs or school.

11. Go over the abilities and commitment of other family members with regard to the child.

12. Get the parent to be specific about how he could be an effective parent and whether he can and will do what it takes.

13. Ask the parent how he will give the child love and attention when the child can't give it back.

14. Frame parenting as a job that the parent is in charge of. Does he want the job or does he want to choose someone else for it?

Considering Parenting

ISSUE 7

Sheri loved her little boy too much to consider losing him. Ryan had been in a foster home for six months. Sheri visited him and dreamed about having him back with her. But she couldn't seem to think straight about making a good home for herself and Ryan.

People were telling her so many different things. Her relatives said if she didn't fight to get Ryan back, she would be an "unnatural mother." Ryan's father was in California and didn't want him, but he told Sheri that she should never give up their own flesh and blood. Sheri said, "They all pressure me, but none of them were here to help me when Ryan got put in foster care."

Sheri had nightmares about not being able to get home to Ryan and finding him dead. Nobody helped when he cried or drove her crazy wanting attention.

Sheri had to think about whether being Ryan's mother would ever work out. "What I want to do might be different from what I can do," Sheri said.

Discuss the story together.

4

23

15. Have the parent think about what he is willing to give up to have his child with him.

16. Have the parent think ahead five years and answer these questions honestly:

    - Would it be better for him if he had the job of parenting or if someone else did?
    - Would it be better for the child?

YOUR IDEAS

Your Story

How can you support yourself and your child now and in the future?

_____

_____

_____

How much will the other parent help? The grandparents?

_____

_____

_____

How can you do what it takes to make a home for your child? Do you want to?

_____

_____

_____

Are you ready to give love and attention to your child without getting any back?

_____

_____

_____

Think of the next five years. Would it be better for you if someone else parented your child? Would it be better for your child?

_____

_____

_____

5

DON'T FORGET

- ✓ Believe in the parent's ability to choose.
- ✓ Believe the parent can solve problems.
- ✓ Make parenting a choice.
- ✓ Decide if the parent is ready to question parenting.
- ✓ Ask tough questions.
- ✓ Look at past performance.
- ✓ Frame parenting as a job.
- ✓ List what the job of parenting takes.
- ✓ Be persistent.

Issue 8

PRACTICE TIPS

1. Appreciate the courage it takes for you to open this topic. You wouldn't be doing this if you weren't brave.

2. Appreciate and respect the parent's courage to even begin thinking about the possibility of giving up her child.

3. Affirm to the parent that it takes caring and love to consider this option.

4. Use words like *adoption* and *relinquishment* sparingly or not at all. Instead, describe the process by referring to *someone else having the job of parenting* or *making a decision to choose other parents*.

5. Find out how the parent perceives adoption for others before you start her thinking about herself.

6. Begin the questions gently by discussing Shayla. Ask the parent
   - Do you think Shayla made a good decision? Why?
   - If you were Shayla, would it be okay for you to make these plans?

7. Be sensitive to where the parent is now as you ask questions.

8. Have the parent imagine what adoption might be like for her.

9. Find out what kind of parents the parent thinks her child needs.

10. Find out if others in the parent's life have opinions about adoption and what the parent should do.

11. Find out if the parent will have any support if she should choose adoption.

12. Help the parent begin to build a more realistic picture of what adoption would mean.

13. Begin to assess whether the parent can make painful choices for her child's sake (or for her own future). Some parents will not be able to choose adoption. They may not have the mental ability or, for other reasons, may need the state to make the decision.

Considering Adoption

ISSUE 8

Shayla knew she had come to the end of the line on bringing Whitney home from foster care. She felt torn apart because she wanted to be with her boyfriend, Brian, and their new baby, Junior. If Whitney was there and cried, Brian would get angry and hit the little girl. She knew it wouldn't work to have Whitney with them.

Shayla didn't have many choices. Whitney's father rarely saw her and didn't help with money. Her grandmother was sick and couldn't help anymore.

Shayla said she wanted her children's lives to be better than hers. She was learning more about being a good parent in her classes, and she realized she had never been a real mother for Whitney. Shayla finally knew in her heart she could learn to do better with the new baby, but she was never going to be able to make a good home for Whitney.

Whitney needed a secure home and new parents. Shayla hurt inside and cried when she thought about it. But she also felt a great relief when she started planning the kind of adoption that would be best for Whitney and herself.

Adoption

Discuss the story together.

39

6

14. If appropriate, say, "Some people say, *When you choose adoption, you are choosing to hurt for the sake of the child.* How do you feel about this statement?"

15. Be accepting of the path that evolves from the parent's actions and choices.

YOUR IDEAS

Your Story

What would it be like to have someone else raise your child?

_____

_____

_____

What kind of parent(s) could do a good job?

_____

_____

_____

Does anyone else think adoption is what you should do?

_____

_____

_____

What support could you get for planning an adoption?

_____

_____

_____

What would you do afterwards?

_____

_____

_____

7

DON'T FORGET

- ✓ Ease into the topic with Shayla's story.
- ✓ Start from where the parent is now.
- ✓ Use neutral words.
- ✓ Respect the parent's courage.
- ✓ Respect your own courage.
- ✓ Let the parent describe adoption to you.
- ✓ Find out what others in the parent's life think.
- ✓ Help the parent build a realistic picture.
- ✓ See if the parent can make painful choices.
- ✓ Evaluate the parent's ability to choose adoption.

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Issue 9

PRACTICE TIPS

1. Begin the difficult task of having the parent consider the child's needs by opening with easy questions.

2. Read the *Dear Abby* letter out loud. Ask:
   - "Why do you think the card from his mother made the boy cry?"
   - "Do you think that was a good thing?" "Why?"
   - "Why does the foster/adoptive mother say parents should give the child a keepsake and tell them they were loved?"
   - "Why do you think Abby put this letter in the paper?"

3. Have the parent think and talk about all the children and parents who are in the boy's situation.

4. Find out if the parent knows children in foster care who have been in a similar situation.

5. Reread the letter if you think it will help to bring things more out in the open.

6. Spend plenty of time finding out what the parent thinks about the boy's situation before moving on to the parent's own circumstances.

7. Find out what the parent thinks is the best gift for a child in foster care.

8. After spending time on the letter, move on to the hard questions about the parent's own child's needs.

9. Using the first two questions from *Your Story* (Issue 8), get the parent to be specific about how and why his child might feel loved or unloved.

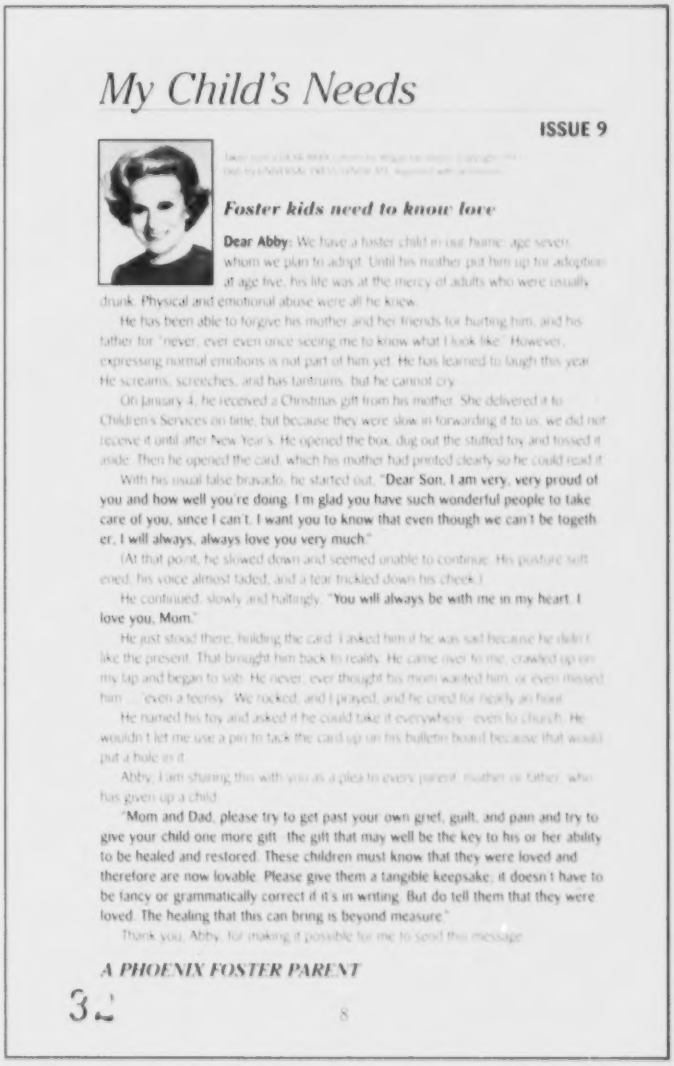
10. Ask questions that make the parent—not you—work hard on the answers. Avoid questions that the parent can answer with a "Yes" or "No."

11. Discuss how children often think that bad things are their fault. Encourage the parent to give specific examples.

12. See if the parent can think about his child's feelings of fear and lack of safety.

13. Don't let shrugs or passive answers from the parent put you off. Persist.

14. Know why you are asking a question. Be clear about your goal of having the parent think about the child's needs.



My Child's Needs

ISSUE 9

Foster kids need to know love

Dear Abby: We have a foster child in our home, age seven, whom we plan to adopt. Until his mother put him up for adoption at age five, his life was at the mercy of adults who were usually drunk. Physical and emotional abuse were all he knew.

He has been able to forgive his mother and her friends for hurting him, and his father, for "never, ever even once seeing me to know what I look like." However, expressing normal emotions is not part of him yet. He has learned to laugh this year. He screams, screeches, and has tantrums, but he cannot cry.

On January 4, he received a Christmas gift from his mother. She delivered it to Children's Services on time, but because they were slow in forwarding it to us, we did not receive it until after New Year's. He opened the box, dug out the stuffed toy and tossed it aside. Then he opened the card, which his mother had printed clearly so he could read it.

With his usual false bravado, he started out, "Dear Son, I am very, very proud of you and how well you're doing. I'm glad you have such wonderful people to take care of you, since I can't. I want you to know that even though we can't be together, I will always, always love you very much."

(At that point, he slowed down and seemed unable to continue. His posture softened, his voice almost faded, and a tear trickled down his cheek.)

He continued, slowly and haltingly, "You will always be with me in my heart. I love you, Mom."

He just stood there, holding the card. I asked him if he was sad because he didn't like the present. That brought him back to reality. He came over to me, crawled up on my lap and began to sob. He never, ever thought his mom wanted him, or even missed him ... even a teensy. We rocked, and I prayed, and he cried for nearly an hour.

He named his toy and asked if he could take it everywhere—even to church. He wouldn't let me use a pin to tack the card up on his bulletin board because that would put a hole in it.

Abby, I am sharing this with you as a plea to every parent, mother or father, who has given up a child:

"Mom and Dad, please try to get past your own grief, guilt, and pain and try to give your child one more gift—the gift that may well be the key to his or her ability to be healed and restored. These children must know that they were loved and therefore are now lovable. Please give them a tangible keepsake; it doesn't have to be fancy or grammatically correct if it's in writing. But do tell them that they were loved. The healing that this can bring is beyond measure."

Thank you, Abby, for making it possible for me to send this message.

A PHOENIX FOSTER PARENT

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8

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15. Put together a list of things the parent feels the child needs to feel safe, secure, and loved.

16. Expand on even the smallest glimpses of understanding the parent may have.

17. Write down each thought the parent has about his child's needs. These thoughts should come from the parent, not you. These will be the ideas you will come back to again and again.

YOUR IDEAS

Your Story

How loved do you think your child feels?

_____

_____

_____

Did your child feel loved in early life?

_____

_____

_____

Could your child think the bad things that happened might be his or her fault?

_____

_____

_____

How safe does your child feel? How safe did your child feel in his or her early life?

_____

_____

_____

How could your child best learn to feel loved and to feel safe and secure?

_____

_____

_____

9

DON'T FORGET

- ✓ Start with easy questions.
- ✓ Relate to familiar things.
- ✓ Talk about other children first.
- ✓ Make the parent work on answers.
- ✓ Work up to the hard questions.
- ✓ Know why you are asking a question.
- ✓ Don't be put off by passivity.
- ✓ Return to the child's needs.

33

Issue 10

PRACTICE TIPS

1. Talk about Francesca in the context of how families make a difference.

2. Find out what the parent's family is thinking and doing about her child.

3. Fill in the picture of who is involved and who is important.

4. Try to understand who has the most influence with the parent. Do not ignore the child's other parent or others who must be considered.
   - Who in the family has been helpful in efforts toward reunification?
   - Who has made reunification more difficult?
   - Whose involvement in planning for the child is crucial?

5. Involve other family members early and consistently. Meet with them to assess their support for any plans the parent is making.

6. Be aware of any changes in family circumstances that might cause other family members to lend or remove their support.

7. Assess what is and is not possible with the family.

8. If the parent has begun to think for herself, draw out what is different now.

9. Notice actions that show the parent is starting to make conscious decisions.

10. Mention that it's easy for others to be critical when they don't have parenting responsibilities.

11. Encourage and support the parent's plans for her child, being sensitive to her culture.

12. Encourage the parent to do more of what has helped her think for herself.

13. Find out how the parent decides what is right and wrong. How will she know?

Involving My Family

ISSUE 10

Francesca started planning an adoption for her two girls because she felt she couldn't live without Ricardo. She wanted to do what was right for her children and make her own decisions. "I'm tired of listening to everyone else," she said.

All her relatives told her that she was doing a terrible thing giving up her own flesh and blood. Her support group urged her to find at least one relative who would support her. She asked her relatives about her father whom she had never known. She learned that she had a grandmother in a different state, so she took a bus there to meet her for the first time.

Francesca and her grandmother talked about family and cried together. Her grandmother said, "It's good you can think for yourself about the adoption. Maybe you can also think for yourself about leaving Ricardo and getting the girls back."

She came home after rethinking her life and moved in with two roommates. If she could make a home without a man, she could have the girls back soon. Her plan with her caseworker included learning better ways of parenting and a new approach to men.

Who Will Help Me Do What's Right?

- ⌞ Children's father
- ⌞ Children's grandparents
- ⌞ My family
- ⌞ My spouse/lover
- ⌞ My good friends
- ⌞ _____
- ⌞ _____

Discuss the story together.

3 1

10

14. Find out specifically what the parent thinks would be best for her child. Some people believe it shows more love and caring to plan adoption than to keep trying to take care of a child when a parent can't do the job.

15. Encourage the parent to think about the supports she'll need or want from others.

YOUR IDEAS

Your Story

If you made a parenting plan, who would support you doing what you need to do?

_____

_____

_____

Who would support an adoption plan?

_____

_____

_____

Do you feel strong enough to make up your own mind?

_____

_____

_____

What would help you think for yourself?

_____

_____

_____

What is best for your child?

_____

_____

_____

11

DON'T FORGET

- ✓ Acknowledge that families make a difference.
- ✓ Find out whose support is crucial to the parent.
- ✓ Fill in the picture.
- ✓ Be aware of any major changes.
- ✓ Find out who decides what's right or wrong.
- ✓ Uncover what shows caring to the parent.
- ✓ Validate the parent's best motives.
- ✓ Give the parent permission to think for herself.

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Issue 11

PRACTICE TIPS

1. Help the parent list the three or four most important things his child needs.

2. Help the parent think through times when he noticed his child needed something.

3. Ignore for the moment whether those needs have been met unless the parent is eager to talk about the subject.

4. With the list of the child's most important needs in hand, list what the parent will need to do to meet those needs.

5. Explore what kind of parent would be able to do this. Take notes on points the parent has made (not your own ideas).

6. Explain permanency again.

7. Discuss what happens when a child's most important needs are not met.

8. Keep the focus on the child, since other lessons have focused on the parent.

9. Affirm that it takes courage to say "Maybe I can't do this."

10. Let the parent raise his own doubts about his ability to meet his child's needs.

11. If the parent expresses doubts about his ability to meet his child's needs, begin to talk about finding other parents who can meet those needs.

12. Tell the parent it takes a great deal of caring and courage to allow someone else to do for our children what we cannot do ourselves.

13. Be realistic about what types of adoptive families may be available, but do not be pessimistic or increase the parent's fear that no good family will be found for his child.

14. Affirm that there is a family somewhere who can be right for this child.

15. Have the most significant family members present. Let them take part in discussions about the child's needs and potential adoptive parents.

16. Meet with family members separately and together as necessary to keep the focus on the plan for the child.

Children with Special Needs

ISSUE 11

Loni showed courage when she looked for a solution to her children's special problems. They needed a home life that didn't change from day to day. Learning things came hard to them. Someone would have to be patient and understanding when they were hyperactive and immature.

Loni didn't think she would ever be able to make a stable, consistent home for them herself. It seemed impossible to her to find the right schools and programs for their special needs. She also couldn't imagine giving up the things in her life that didn't work for the children.

Loni decided that, hard as it was for her, she would try to find a new family for her children. She wanted the three children to be together with parents who could be patient and deal with their problems. She knew how easy it was to get angry and lash out or find some escape when the kids got really impossible.

The Indian Child Welfare adoption specialist helped Loni and her caseworker think about finding the right family. She felt sad and relieved at the same time.

Discuss the story together.

Children With Special Problems Need Extra Help From:

- Parents
- Relatives
- Schools & Teachers
- Religious Groups
- Therapists
- Doctors
- Social Workers

3 3 12

17. Address family members' concerns so that those individuals can begin supporting the parent's plans. Remain respectful but realistic as you address these concerns.

18. Help the parent build support within the family for what he needs to do.

19. Ask the parent again what would help him make good choices about his child's future.

YOUR IDEAS

Your Story

What special needs does your child have?

_____

_____

_____

What kind of parent(s) does he or she need?

_____

_____

_____

What might make it hard to find the right parent(s)?

_____

_____

_____

Should anyone else help in the planning?

_____

_____

_____

What would help you make good choices in planning your child's future?

_____

_____

_____

13

DON'T FORGET

- ✓ List each child's needs.
- ✓ List the parent's job.
- ✓ Explain permanency.
- ✓ Discuss unmet needs.
- ✓ Keep the focus on the child.
- ✓ Affirm that it takes courage to consider adoption.
- ✓ Be realistic about adoptive parents.
- ✓ Bring the whole family into planning.
- ✓ Build support for planning.

Issue 12

PRACTICE TIPS

1. Help the parent to clearly understand the seriousness of the situation.
2. Explain to the parent that if she doesn't make a plan, the court will decide.
3. Explain to the parent that if the court terminates her parental rights, she will never have any right to see her child again or be involved in her child's life in any way.
4. Make sure that the parent understands that termination trials are generally ugly affairs, with people being called to testify to every bad thing they know about the parent.
5. Explain that termination trials are totally unlike any other court proceeding that the parent may know of. There is no probation, parole, or leniency. It is all or nothing.
6. Let the parent know that her time is up for leaving her child in limbo.
7. Explore advice that has been given in the past and was not taken. Don't repeat that advice. Let the possibilities for moving forward come from the parent. The parent may be hesitant to make a commitment to any plan, be that return home or adoption. Ask, "When you think seriously about what your child needs, what do you sometimes think needs to happen?"
8. Consider saying, "I know this is not an easy decision. My concern is that time is not on your side. The court will apply pressure and will eventually take away your choices unless you make a decision."
9. Find out what the parent needs to begin planning seriously. Does someone else need to be involved with her in the planning process?
10. Once the parent has started making tentative plans, make sure she looks seriously at all of her options, especially the ones you know are reasonable.
11. Make sure that the parent's plans are reasonable before going too far. Otherwise, you are setting the parent up for failure.
12. If the parent is ignoring an option or refusing to consider it, find out why.
13. Don't pressure. Be patient. The parent may need some time to consider. The choice really is hers.

Considering My Options Again

ISSUE 12

Adoption

Nick finally gave up on Lisa and her drug problems. His caseworker said the two children had been in foster care too long. Nick had to make a plan for their future whether he was ready or not. The caseworker said that just visiting once a week was not a choice anymore.

Nick spent time making a list of what his kids needed in a parent. He thought they should be in a family where they were safe and secure. A committed parent would give them what they needed most, even when it was difficult.

Nick's caseworker insisted he look at his list and think about whether he could do those things himself. He had been sober for almost a year and had held a job for two months. Did he want to give the job of raising his kids to someone else or did he want to try it himself?

First he gave up his dream of Lisa. Then Nick had to consider single parenting for himself in detail. After a weekend with the children, Nick decided that nothing meant more to him than his kids. He would make a commitment and a plan for raising them himself.

Parenting

Discuss the story together.

14

14. Using the word *when* is appropriate when you want to ask questions that will move the parent forward.

15. Using the word *if* is appropriate when you are dealing with plans that you doubt will bear fruit.

16. If the parent says, "I don't know" to the last workbook question, ask, "Do you ever think about what might be best for your child? What do you think about?"

YOUR IDEAS

Your Story

What makes it hard for you to be realistic about your choices?

_____

_____

_____

How can you get started planning?

_____

_____

_____

Are you seriously looking at all options?

_____

_____

_____

Is there anything you refuse to do or consider doing? Why?

_____

_____

_____

Do you know, in your heart, what would be best for your child?

_____

_____

_____

15

DON'T FORGET

- ✓ Stress the seriousness of the situation.
- ✓ Tell the parent her time is up and the court will decide if she doesn't plan.
- ✓ Don't repeat past advice that didn't work.
- ✓ Press for an initial choice that is realistic.
- ✓ Have the parents considered all options.
- ✓ Use *when* and *if* carefully.
- ✓ Get to the heart of the matter.

39

PRACTICE TIPS

1. Open the discussion by talking about other people's losses.

2. Ask the parent if he believes everyone experiences sadness, grief, and pain in their lives from time to time.

3. Ask the parent to think of times when people would have feelings of grief or sadness.

4. Ask the parent how he thinks people cope with those feelings.

5. Ask the parent if he is aware that loss brings other feelings—denial, anger, guilt, and depression—along with sadness.

6. Find out if the parent has ever lost someone he loved.

7. Encourage the parent to describe that loss. Past losses may have felt so bad that the parent feels he could never endure losing a child by adoption.

8. Ask the parent how he dealt with the loss, exploring any emotions he may have felt.

9. Validate for the parent that his feelings make sense and are expressed by everyone.

10. Be aware of the parent's current feelings and validate those as well.

11. Explain that each new loss is connected to an original loss. If the parent lost a parent as a child, even for a short while, all losses will feel like that first one.

12. If the parent is ready, help him imagine the loss of a child in general, then the loss of his own child.

13. Imagine together what might happen to the parent afterward (relate back to the earlier description of the loss of a loved one).

14. Draw out what might help the parent survive the loss. What might help him deal with painful feelings?

15. Build on anything the parent did before that helped him release his feelings (i.e., talking, crying, etc.).

Thinking About Loss

ISSUE 13

Terrell and Yvonne were planning new families for three of their four children. Their oldest girl, Kenya, was going to come home with them as soon as they were done with their parenting and anger management classes and had finished their plan for her safety.

Their hardest job was facing the grief of losing three of their children. They knew it was best, but that didn't make it any easier. Michael was going to live with his father in another state. The two younger girls would be adopted by their aunt and uncle.

"After we sign the papers, I'll know that it's final. We won't be a whole family ever again," Yvonne said. "It's hard to make plans for the children to grow up with somebody else. I hope they know we still love them."

Terrell and Yvonne were feeling sadness and guilt about their decision. Their caseworker explained how losing something important can make people feel emotional and crazy at times. Losing a child is probably the hardest thing that can happen to a parent. They hoped others, especially their family, would support them and respect their courage.

Discuss the story together.

16

16. Mention that it is natural for people to avoid making decisions that are painful. Point out that avoiding pain now may lead to even greater pain for the parent in the future.

17. Affirm that when bad things happen, people still have a choice about how they handle the situation. Again, it may be better for the parent to decide his child's future rather than the court.

YOUR IDEAS

Your Story

Have you ever lost someone you loved?

What kind of support did you want then?

Can you imagine losing a child?

What might help give you strength to handle grief and loss and get through it?

What might happen if you avoid the decision about your child?

17

DON'T FORGET

- ✓ Talk about others first.
- ✓ Go over loss in general.
- ✓ Find out what the parent thinks will happen.
- ✓ Find out what is normal to the parent.
- ✓ Ask if the parent lost someone.
- ✓ Validate the parent's feelings.
- ✓ Be gentle.
- ✓ Imagine losing a child.
- ✓ Uncover what would help the parent to deal with the loss.

4

MEDIATING PERMANENCY OUTCOMES: PARENT EMPOWERMENT WORKBOOKS

A Cooperative Adoption

WORKBOOK 3

Jeanne Etter

4

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Issue 14

PRACTICE TIPS

1. Stress to the parent that involvement with the state is usually involuntary, but making the choice to plan a cooperative adoption is voluntary.

2. Acknowledge that while the choice to plan a cooperative adoption may be voluntary, it is still painful to choose to permanently separate one's family.

3. Recognize that the parent will not be able to make the choice easily or without ambivalence, and walk away. As long as the parent is actively involved in planning for her child's future, however, it is still her child and her adoption. This will not change until placement.

4. Avoid the temptation to play God. What birth parents need to feel most is that they are in charge of plans for their children's adoption.

5. Tell the parent that, no matter what happens, the child will always be related to her birth parent and family. The parent will usually know best how she can keep the connection and love alive while her child grows up in a new family.

6. Empower the parent to make choices about her child's adoption whenever possible, to serve the best interests of the child.

7. Plan for communication. Without some form of connection, the child will create a fantasy relationship with the birth parent and have difficulty developing her own identity. Communication between adoptive and birth parents will also help both families and the child come to terms with the severing of old ties and the creation of new ones.

8. Do not proceed with a parent until the parameters are clearly understood When parameters are properly set and a careful mediation process is followed, birth parents are not a threat to adoptive placements.

9. Help the parent understand that openness in adoption is designed to keep the child connected to the birth family and the love the birth family can provide. Openness, however, does not mean continuing to share parenting responsibilities.

10. If necessary, simplify the situation to the basics: the child needs new parents and also needs a tie to the love of her first family.

Openness in an Adoption

ISSUE 14

Shayla made her agonizing decision to have Whitney be adopted. She felt a mixture of sadness, guilt, and relief as she talked with her caseworker about the kind of adoption she wanted for her little girl.

She had to realize that she had not been able to give Whitney the things a child needs. Shayla thought Whitney's foster parents could give her the warmth and security that her little girl needed so much.

Whitney began to call her foster parents "Mom" and "Dad." At first it bothered Shayla, but she liked the way they were patient and gentle with Whitney. That was especially important for Whitney, who had been yelled at and hit a lot in her early years. Shayla realized it was time for Whitney to love other people who cared for her the way she couldn't.

Shayla wanted Whitney to never forget how much she loved her even though she couldn't make a good home for her. She made a commitment to write to her daughter at least once a year. She hoped the foster parents would want to adopt Whitney in an open adoption.

Discuss the story together.

4

11. Discuss appropriate ways the parent can realistically show her love while allowing her child to have a new family.

12. Help the parent look ahead to a relationship with the adoptive family.

13. Record the openness options that are presented to the parent.

YOUR IDEAS

Your Story

Can you imagine other parents for your child?

_____

_____

_____

How hard would it be to let your child have a new family?

_____

_____

_____

Could you honestly let go of being the parent?

_____

_____

_____

How could you show your love while your child is growing up in a different family?

_____

_____

_____

What choices can you consider for staying in touch after an adoption?

_____

_____

_____

5

DON'T FORGET

- ✓ Let the parent make the choice to separate her family.
- ✓ Recognize that it's the parent's child, the parent's adoption.
- ✓ Allow the parent to be in charge.
- ✓ Don't play God.
- ✓ Point out that the child will always be related.
- ✓ Know the parameters.
- ✓ Make sure the parent understands adoption and openness.
- ✓ Discuss how the parent can express her love.
- ✓ Help the parent look ahead.

45

Issue 15

PRACTICE TIPS

1. Acknowledge that the parent usually wants the adoptive family to be perfect and his child to have a perfect life to make his decision feel acceptable.
2. Help the parent understand that reality will always fall short of his ideal.
3. Be both warm and accepting but also human. The birth parent may see you as a role model for adoptive parents.
4. Help the parent see he is choosing people, not an unchanging family situation.
5. Discuss the possibility of the adoptive parents moving or divorcing.
6. Obtain the adoptive parents' permission to share nonidentifying information from their homestudy.
7. Avoid withholding nonidentifying information. Birth parents have a right and need to know.
8. Don't guarantee to the parent that the information provided by the adoptive parents is accurate. Adoptive parents could be withholding information or lying. The adoptive parents' willingness to have an open adoption, however, makes it less likely they have something to hide.
9. Help the parent prioritize the realistic values and qualities he desires in a family.
10. Use first names of the potential adoptive parents as the parent looks at profiles and autobiographies.
11. Ask the parent to pick his first, second, and third choice families. This keeps the parent from feeling stuck with his last choice family.
12. Remind the parent that the adoptive parents also have a choice and may not be ready.
13. Help the parent think about whether sending letters and photos are the best way for him to show his love or whether a meeting every year with his child is desirable.
14. Assume that one meeting a year will be likely if the parent has gotten this far in the process and if parameters allow for it.
15. Don't plan for a meeting every year unless all parties can meet face-to-face before the placement to make a decision about one another.

Choosing Adoptive Parents

ISSUE 15

Sheri had Ryan come home on a trial basis, but she couldn't handle him. Her psychological evaluation explained why she wouldn't be able to give Ryan the special care and attention he needed.

Choosing new parents to raise Ryan seemed somewhat easier now. She was learning to accept that everyone isn't able to be a parent.

Ryan's foster parents' health problems had gotten worse, and they couldn't adopt him. So Sheri and her caseworker searched for new parents. Together, they looked at profiles of possible families. Sheri knew she wanted to stay in touch with Ryan in his new life. All of the adoptive parents she considered were willing to have at least one meeting a year after the adoption.

Sheri chose three couples she thought would be great for Ryan. All had lots of patience and a strong commitment to children. Her first-choice family said "yes" and was approved by the agency. Sheri felt great relief along with sadness when it was decided.

Discuss the story together.

4 6

16. Begin a thorough education on the need for building a good relationship.

17. Be clear that written agreements are a minimum and not as important as relationships. The relationship with the adoptive family is what will make the difference in the years to come.

18. Explain that the adoption agreement is a basis for a relationship, not a bargaining tool.

19. Remember that the basis for the plan is the child's needs.

Your Story

What values and qualities would you most like adoptive parents to have?

_____

_____

_____

What is realistic for your situation?

_____

_____

_____

Do you want to exchange letters and pictures only, have meetings after the adoption, or both?

_____

_____

_____

Why is one meeting a year good for those who will have a written adoption agreement for ongoing contract?

_____

_____

_____

How can you work to build a trusting relationship that can lead to more than your minimum contact?

_____

_____

_____

7

YOUR IDEAS

DON'T FORGET

- ✓ Acknowledge that the parent will want perfection in the adoptive family.
- ✓ Choose people, not the family.
- ✓ Keep information nonidentifying.
- ✓ Share other information fully.
- ✓ Don't guarantee that all of the information is accurate.
- ✓ Look for realistic adoptive parent qualities.
- ✓ Have the parent choose three families.
- ✓ Stress that adoptive parents also get a choice.
- ✓ Assume one meeting per year.
- ✓ Plan for the first meeting before placement.

Issue 16

PRACTICE TIPS

1. Do your homework carefully before you call the first choice family about their interest in the child. The potential adoptive parents will begin to form a picture of the child and birth parent immediately. Your call begins the mediation between the birth and potential adoptive parents and could be the beginning of their relationship.
2. Discuss the worst first, so the potential adoptive parents can absorb it, then share the rest.
3. Explain why the parent picked the potential adoptive parents and what she liked about them.
4. Use a form that allows the potential adoptive parents and you to take notes.
5. Define the time period you are giving potential adoptive parents to think the adoption over (typically two or three days).
6. If the potential adoptive parents aren't sure by the end of the given time, move on to the next choice family.
7. Let potential adoptive parents know their decision not to take the child will not influence their chance for another adoption if they aren't ready for this one.
8. Explain that the potential adoptive parents can decide after meeting the parent if they want to go forward.
9. Call the parent to let her know what the adoptive parents said. Set up the meeting.
10. Have a goal and process for the first meeting clearly in mind. The meeting is the first chance the birth parent and potential adoptive parents will have to get to know one another and decide if they want to go forward together.
11. Encourage the parent to bring a support person.
12. Prepare everyone for the meeting. They will remember this meeting the rest of their lives.
13. Be quiet. Let the parent and potential adoptive parents talk to each other. You are there as a boundary setter and safety net.
14. Ask the parent alone (after 30 minutes or so) how she feels about the adoptive parents. Her answer is the key. If she feels relief, the match is probably right. If she has reservations, it probably isn't. If the latter occurs, put plans on hold.

Meeting Adoptive Parents

ISSUE 16

The caseworker contacted Loni's tribe about the adoption. The tribe was supportive of her plan, but did not have a family for her three children. So the Indian Child Welfare specialist helped find an American Indian family in another state. They were delighted to take all of the children.

The couple was also willing to meet Loni and exchange letters and pictures over the years. They set a date to meet and said Loni should bring photos of the children to help them get acquainted.

The Indian Child Welfare specialist helped everyone feel comfortable when they sat down together. The couple had pictures of their other children and their home to share with Loni. Loni's pictures of her children helped her start talking and get over feeling shy and insecure.

They didn't talk about the adoption details or the written agreement at this first meeting. They just got to know each other. After half an hour, the specialist spoke with Loni alone and asked her how she felt. She smiled and said she liked them very much and felt a great sense of relief. Everyone agreed to plan together and make this adoption work.

Discuss the story together.

43

8

15. If the parent is pleased, ask the adoptive parents separately how they feel.

16. If both parties feel good about the match, you can make plans for the next meeting. Then let them continue getting acquainted on their own if the parent is capable of doing so without you.

YOUR IDEAS

Your Story

Why might you want to meet the adoptive parents?

_____

_____

_____

What could they tell you about themselves?

_____

_____

_____

What could you tell them about yourself?

_____

_____

_____

What might be hard in a meeting with them? What could help make the meeting easier?

_____

_____

_____

What kind of support would you want and from whom?

_____

_____

_____

9

DON'T FORGET

- ✓ Plan your call to the potential adoptive parents carefully as it begins mediation and the relationship.
- ✓ Share the worst first.
- ✓ Tell the potential adoptive parents what the parent likes about them.
- ✓ Prepare everyone for the first meeting.
- ✓ Use the meeting to allow all parties to get to know each other.
- ✓ Let the clients do the talking.
- ✓ Conduct separate interviews midway through the first meeting.

43

Issue 17

PRACTICE TIPS

1. Talk with the parent and the adoptive parents about mediation, its benefits, and when it is appropriate.

2. Help sort out the roles of the child's birth relatives. Determine who will be involved and how.

3. Learn the comfort levels of the key players and make sure they match before proceeding.

4. Do most of this work in individual sessions—by phone or in person.

5. Give all parties examples of written agreements and explain the benefits of mediation.

6. Help the parent picture staying in touch. What is realistic?

7. Help the parent picture showing love to his child over the years.

8. Help the parent plan how he will assist his child in becoming a part of the new family (letter, good-bye visit, Life Story Book, time with no contact, etc.). The agreement will cover meetings with the adoptive family which will usually, but not always, include the child.

9. Explain how the child's need for seeing the parent will vary with time.

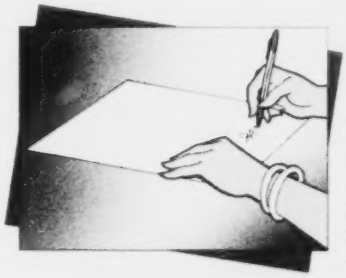
10. Help the parent accept the practical reality of adoptive families' limited time to make many commitments.

11. Help everyone plan ahead. Write down notes, dates, and times for them. People need to picture what comes next and be able to prepare themselves.

12. Help the parent understand that the written agreement sets out a minimum contact requirement. Additional contacts may come when things go well. The more understanding the parent shows of the adoptive family's needs, the better the chance for a positive relationship.

Planning the Agreement

ISSUE 17



Terrell and Yvonne received help from an adoption mediator to plan for their four children. Michael was going to live in another state with his birth father and grandmother. Kenya was coming home next month.

The two younger girls were in a foster home but were moving to their aunt and uncle's home as soon as the adoption agreement was ready. At first no one wanted to bother with a written plan. After the mediator talked to everyone separately, they realized they each had fears about what could go wrong. It seemed worthwhile to write up their agreement.

They agreed on a minimum of one meeting a year, around Christmas. If they all felt good about meeting more often, they would. Everyone was concerned about old problems in the family coming up. If things were not good, they were still willing to get together once a year so Terrell and Yvonne could stay in touch with the girls. Terrell and Yvonne also wanted to send the girls birthday presents to let them know they cared.

Discuss the story together.

Agreements Help:

- Protect everyone
- Meet children's needs
- Act as insurance
- Help in rough times

10

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

13. Make careful plans for involving the child. Plan an introduction to the adoptive parents and a flexible transition.

14. Plan to mediate the adoption agreement after the introduction of the child and adoptive parents but before the placement.

YOUR IDEAS

Your Story

How could a mediator help you with adoption plans?

_____

_____

_____

What are the good and bad points about having a written agreement?

_____

_____

_____

In what ways could you stay in touch with your child?

_____

_____

_____

How does your child know you love him or her?

_____

_____

_____

How can you let your child become part of a new family?

_____

_____

_____

11

DON'T FORGET

- ✓ Explain the benefits of mediation.
- ✓ Sort out family roles.
- ✓ Learn the parties' comfort levels.
- ✓ Educate all key players.
- ✓ Use individual meetings.
- ✓ Picture how the parent can show love.
- ✓ Stress the child's needs in the new family.
- ✓ Recognize that the child's participation in openness will vary.
- ✓ Explain that the minimum contact is for difficult times and that additional contact can grow when things go well.

Issue 18

PRACTICE TIPS

1. Have clear parameters established well before this point.
2. Be cautious. The parent and adoptive family can move toward more openness in the future but can't back up.
3. Be open to revising parameters about supervising visits based on how you have observed the parent and the adoptive family relating in their first mediation meetings.
4. If the parent isn't going to have big choices, make sure she has small ones.
5. Allow the parent and the adoptive family to make decisions about everything that hasn't been set by the parameters. It's their adoption.
6. Review the child's health history and fill in any details. Pass this history on to the adoptive family.
7. Plan what you want for the child to take to the adoptive family. Get help completing the Life Story Book and family history.
8. Give the parent and the adoptive family legal documents to review before this point. Make sure everyone understands the legal procedures.
9. Explain the "point of no return" to all parties.
10. Be clear that the child the parent's child before the "point of no return" and the adoptive family's afterwards. Openness means sharing a connection across the line but does not change the legal rights.
11. Using the *Issue 18* questions, help the birth parent learn to build a positive relationship.
12. Instead of saying to the parent, "Your behavior is too unpredictable and manipulative for you to meet with the adoptive parents alone," reframe to something like, "Who would you like to have with you in the meetings to make sure the adoptive parents don't misunderstand you?"
    - Reframing offers a positive interpretation of something troublesome.
    - Reframing helps the parent accept limits.
    - Reframing helps the adoptive parents accept the parent as she is.
13. Instead of telling adoptive parents the birth parent is aggressive and intimidating, say that she stands up for herself and what she thinks is right, even when she pays a high price for it.

Contact Before Placement

ISSUE 18

After the first meeting, Sheri and the Salmonsons liked each other. The Salmonsons enjoyed getting to know Ryan a little at his foster home. But Sheri was still confused and worried that this adoption had too many problems. At first, Sheri felt sorry for herself because none of her relatives cared enough to meet Ryan's new parents. Sheri's caseworker supported her in getting to know the Salmonsons. Then Sheri felt she had enough support to do the adoption.

Sheri knew the Salmonsons had been worried because she was not mentally stable. After they met for the second time and planned their adoption agreement, they felt safer with each other.

They all wanted to help Ryan get used to his new parents. They decided they could handle an outing together. The Salmonsons picked up Sheri, then Ryan from his foster home. Ryan was excited about spending time with them.

Now that she saw how much the Salmonsons liked her and Ryan, Sheri relaxed. She knew it would be hard for her not to see Ryan every week, but he and the Salmonsons had to become a family. Sheri agreed to have plans for meetings written down. That would help her avoid trying to get too involved in Ryan's new family.

Discuss the story together.

5. 12

14. Build on positive things the parent has done in earlier meetings, and help the adoptive parents to do the same.

15. Use the parent's answers to earlier questions, with her permission, to help the adoptive parents understand and empathize.

YOUR IDEAS

Your Story

How can you start building a trusting relationship with the adoptive parents?

_____

_____

_____

Will your get-togethers be supervised?

_____

_____

_____

What could be good for the adoptive parents about spending a little time with you?

_____

_____

_____

What might be scary for the adoptive parents about spending a little time with you?

_____

_____

_____

What could be good and bad for you about spending a little time with the adoptive parents?

_____

_____

_____

13

DON'T FORGET

- ✓ Set cautious limits.
- ✓ Be open to revision.
- ✓ Give people choices.
- ✓ Complete histories.
- ✓ Complete the Life Story Book.
- ✓ Review legal documents very early.
- ✓ Explain the point of no return.
- ✓ Help the birth parent and adoptive parents to build a relationship.
- ✓ Reframe difficult issues.
- ✓ Build on the positive.

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Issue 19

PRACTICE TIPS

1. Schedule at least one meeting for the parent and the adoptive parents to get acquainted and make sure the circumstances are right for them before they begin planning their agreement.
2. In separate sessions, facilitate resolution of any major issues beforehand.
3. Open the mediation session by listing what the parties say are the benefits to the child of maintaining contact.
4. Ask the parent to start the list and to include benefits to himself. Then ask the adoptive parents to add to the list. If the focus shifts away from the real purpose of cooperation, the list can help re-establish unity.
5. Explain why the adoption agreement sets out minimum contacts and that additional contacts may evolve if things go well and the agreement works out for everyone.
6. Discuss how the child may need six months to a year to bond with the new family.
7. Start actual work on the agreement with easy issues and move into hard ones.
8. The agreement's wording is crucial. Know what you are creating. Keep to the form whenever possible to protect yourself, the parent, and the adoptive parents.
9. Explain to the parent and the adoptive parents what they are setting up for themselves if they don't see it easily.
10. Make sure both sides understand how the adoption agreement protects them.
11. Explain what each side could lose by breaking the agreement and that the parent could lose his rights if he becomes adversarial.
12. Explain that meetings will be with the adoptive family in a supervised, neutral setting (unless you have planned otherwise). The child's participation in meetings will vary because his needs will change with time.
13. Help everyone be realistic about transportation. Be fair but don't shut the parent out because the adoptive parents may move across the country. The adoptive parents could agree to pay for a visit every other year, for example.
14. Once the written agreement is drafted, have everyone look it over and sign the rough draft. Set a date to sign the final copy.
15. Put the agreement aside and talk about hopes for contact when things go well.

The Adoption Agreement

ISSUE 19

Whitney's foster parents wanted a cooperative adoption the way Shayla hoped they would. They decided to use an adoption mediator to help them work things out.

Shayla was both happy and sad when the Fletchers picked her up on their way to the mediator's office.

They agreed Shayla should have the right to stay in touch with her little girl and the Fletchers after the adoption. Without this agreement written down, Shayla would have no protection if they decided to close the door on her later.

They all understood the agreement was like an insurance policy. If problems came up later on, Shayla could always have at least one meeting a year with the Fletchers. If they all got along well, they could meet as often as everyone wanted to. Whitney could also stay in touch with her little brother.

The Fletchers said they would pay for transportation for one meeting a year if Shayla needed help. Shayla could write and send gifts to Whitney whenever she wanted, but if she put pressure on or interfered with the Fletchers, she could lose everything. Writing their plan down made all of them feel protected in their new roles.

Discuss the story together.

5

16. Discuss the uncertainty of the first year of the child's adjustment. Stress the need for the adults involved to accommodate themselves to the child's needs.

17. Come back to everyone's commitment to helping the child make this enormous new step in his life with the best possible support.

YOUR IDEAS

Your Story

How could a written agreement protect you?

_____

_____

_____

If things go well, what are your hopes for contact?

_____

_____

_____

If problems come up, what will be your minimum contact?

_____

_____

_____

Why is it good to have a minimum of only one meeting a year written into the agreement?

_____

_____

_____

What, if anything, might tempt you to break your part of the agreement?

_____

_____

_____

15

DON'T FORGET

- ✓ Be clear beforehand on major issues.
- ✓ List the major benefits of contact.
- ✓ Explain the purpose of minimum contact and that additional contact grows when things go well.
- ✓ Begin work with easy issues.
- ✓ Pay attention to wording.
- ✓ Explain protection in the agreement.
- ✓ Establish what will happen if the parent breaks the agreement.
- ✓ Discuss hopes.
- ✓ Commit to the child's needs.

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MEDIATING PERMANENCY OUTCOMES: PARENT EMPOWERMENT WORKBOOKS

Letting Go

WORKBOOK 4

Jeanne Etter

5

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Issue 20

PRACTICE TIPS

1. Recognize that the child will need careful preparation to make the overwhelming changes adoption brings. Is the child getting counseling...
   - To deal with attachment and separation?
   - To deal with past mistreatment from parents or others?
   - To deal with grief and loss?
2. Find out if the child has a Life Story Book that is used frequently to talk about changes.
3. Arrange for volunteers to update the child's Life Story Book with new photos, stories, and notes from the parent.
4. Prepare the child for adoption with as much information as you have.
5. If the child has never met the adoptive parents, share pictures and stories. Make a plan together for their first meeting and for transition visits.
6. Give the child a chance to set one or two realistic short-term goals (i.e., making pictures for the parent and the adoptive parents).
7. Plan the sequence of meetings, visits, and placement with the parents. In a cooperative adoption, the sequence might be: child meets adoptive parents with or without parent, parent signs papers, parent and child have good-bye visit, transition visits take place, placement is made.
8. Plan the good-bye visit by talking with the child and the parent beforehand.
9. Ask the child what she would like to hear from her parent. Start with a list of what other kids have wanted to hear. Let her check off what she wants.
10. Read to the parent from the list of what other kids want to hear. Then talk about what her own child wants to hear.
11. Let the parent begin preparing a letter, a gift, and other supports for the good-bye visit.
12. Help the parent focus occasionally on the long-range challenge of letting go. For example, draw her out about how she thinks she might feel two years from now.
13. Help the parent explore counseling and supportive friends and family as options to encourage her to talk and cry about the pain.

My Plans and Goals

ISSUE 20

Loni's three children were leaving to join their new adoptive family in another state. Loni and the new parents planned the adoption with help from the Indian Child Welfare specialist.

Before the children left, Loni's challenge was to prepare herself and them for the changes coming. Loni and her counselor talked about the emptiness she would feel when she could no longer see her children. The sadness of letting someone else become their parent was already affecting her. She knew her feelings would be even more painful after the children left.

She explained to her friends about the change in her life and asked for their support after the adoption. Loni's closest friend agreed to be with her after her last visit with the children before the adoption.

Loni knew she had to do something constructive or she would feel that her life was over. She enrolled in a dental assistance training program and started classes. Her goals for herself gave meaning to her life, and she looked forward to eventually feeling good about a different kind of relationship with her children.

Discuss the story together.

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14. Help the parent develop plans and goals to keep from getting swamped by grief.

15. Write on a card what the parent will do when she feels the worst.

16. Remind the parent that grieving is work she needs to learn how to do.

17. Review with the parent the grief recovery process and how to adjust to life-shattering changes.

YOUR IDEAS

Your Story

If you don't make good plans, what might your life be like after the adoption?

_____

_____

_____

If you make good plans, what might your life be like after the adoption?

_____

_____

_____

What are two valuable goals you could set for yourself?

_____

_____

_____

Who needs to know what you are going through?

_____

_____

_____

How can that person(s) help?

_____

_____

_____

5

DON'T FORGET

- ✓ Prepare the child.
- ✓ Prepare the parent.
- ✓ Help the child and parent set goals.
- ✓ Help the child and parent to separate.
- ✓ Acknowledge that saying good-bye takes work.
- ✓ Plan the Life Story Book.
- ✓ Plan the good-bye visit.
- ✓ Find out what the child needs to hear.
- ✓ Discuss what the parent can say and do.
- ✓ Have counseling supports in place.

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Issue 21

PRACTICE TIPS

1. Be aware that the way the parent hurt his child may make him seem uncaring. **Remember, he was doing the best he could at the time and has to be able to forgive himself.** Forgiving does not mean excusing or condoning what the parent did.

2. Help the parent begin facing his loss by talking about what others have experienced.

3. Recognize that if the parent breaks down in tears, runs away, or shuts down, you brought up just the right things, not the wrong ones. What the parent did to his child makes it worse and numbness keeps the pain inside.

4. See the parent as a hurting person. If he were not hurting, he would not have been able to hurt his child.

5. Acknowledge that alcohol and drugs can make the parent numb and unable to work through his pain. Numbness makes hurting others possible.

6. Let the parent know that if the numbness gives way to pain, past ungrieved losses will resurface.

7. Research shows that becoming emotional, crying, and shaking are natural ways humans heal themselves.

8. *Welcome* healing tears or screaming when they come naturally, even when they're hard to listen to. The parent's therapist is the one to *try to uncover* the pain. Therapy will be the way for the parent to work through deep loss issues. You can help, however, by not minimizing or avoiding painful topics.

9. Strike a balance between the parent's pain and positive things in the present to make constructive grieving possible.

10. Recognize that people often learn to be ashamed of crying and want to be alone. The human way, however, is to help one another through grief.

11. Remember that forgiving oneself takes work. It often helps to remember everyone was doing the best he or she could at the time, considering everything.

Letting Go

ISSUE 21

Yvonne and Terrell brought Kenya home with them. But they felt a great sense of loss because their other two girls were adopted, and Yvonne's son, Michael, went to live with his father.

It was painful for Yvonne and Terrell to say good-bye to the three children who were not coming home. Sometimes it felt as bad as having a person they loved die. They could see the children at least once a year but it was different from being their mother and father every day.

Yvonne and Terrell discovered that it was hard for others to understand their pain. But some of the people in their church helped them talk and cry about their fear and sadness. If they weren't careful they knew it could turn into anger, and they might hurt Kenya like they had before.

They practiced saying "good-bye" in many ways. Sometimes they had to deal with terrible feelings of guilt and learn to forgive themselves. They felt rage at people who had hurt them earlier in their lives and knew it was a challenge to forgive them. Acceptance and letting go came slowly, but it did come when they had the help they needed.

Discuss the story together.

12. Acknowledge that forgiving others is even harder. They were also doing the best they could at that time.

13. Affirm to the parents that forgiving is very different from approving; that life will not stop being painful for the parent while he deals with this new loss; and that living a life as hard as the parent's will take strength and enormous courage.

YOUR IDEAS

Your Story

What part of your loss might be the most painful?

_____

_____

_____

Does this loss remind you of any other losses in the past?

_____

_____

_____

What helped or could have helped you then?

_____

_____

_____

Forgiving doesn't mean approving. What might you need to forgive yourself for?

_____

_____

_____

What might you need to forgive others for?

_____

_____

_____

7

DON'T FORGET

- ✓ Don't minimize the parent's pain.
- ✓ Recognize that what the parent did to his child makes his pain worse.
- ✓ Know that past ungrieved losses will resurface.
- ✓ Acknowledge that numbness keeps pain inside, and that numbness makes hurting others possible.
- ✓ Discuss what will be different with adoption.
- ✓ Discuss new relationships.
- ✓ Recognize that forgiving is not approving and that living a life this hard takes enormous courage.

6

Issue 22

PRACTICE TIPS

1. Let the parent know that children and parents need help looking at past hurts and accepting that they can't be undone. Past hurts can be healed, however.

2. Talk with the parent about things she can do to help her child heal. Children need help from parents to heal effectively and be able to join a new family.

3. Help the parent to understand that her child likes to hear that the parent loves her, misses her, wants her to be safe and happy, and wants her to love and be loved by another family.

4. Empower the parent to release the child from feeling it was her fault or that she was unworthy or unlovable.
   - The parent can ask to be forgiven for breaking the trust the child had in her.
   - Foster and adoptive parents can help the child heal by working together with the parent.

5. Keep in mind that the child wants to know that the birth, adoptive, and foster parents have been thinking together about what she needs.

6. Help the parent remember a time in the past when she made a good decision about her child's needs.

7. Remind the parent that, no matter what her past actions, she is being a responsible (good) parent now by helping her child to heal and to find a new home. Past failures don't mean the parent can't make good decisions about helping her child now.

8. Carefully plan the sequence of visits and events together. Empower the parent to make whatever decisions concern her.

9. Make a simple plan and make sure everyone involved understands and agrees with it.

10. If everyone can handle it, a visit with the adoptive and birth parents together can be a wonderful bridge to adoption for the child.

11. Let the parent decide when she is ready to sign relinquishment papers. The parent will probably want the time between signing and placement to be as short as possible.

Visits and Transitions

ISSUE 22

Sheri wanted Ryan to have a happy life with the Salmonsons and to know that she loved him. The counselor talked to Ryan about how he could feel good about being adopted. Ryan said he wanted to know his mom loved him and would miss him. He wanted to see her with the Salmonsons before he went to live with them.

Sheri and the Salmonsons met at Ryan's foster home and discussed plans for his transition to his new adoptive home. When Ryan came home from school he was happy to see they had all gotten together and were thinking about him.

He got to go out to eat with his mother and his new adoptive parents. They agreed that in three days he would have his "farewell visit" with his mom, then a weekend with the Salmonsons. Before he moved he would have a neighborhood party to say goodbye to his foster family and friends.

Sheri signed the adoption agreement and her final adoption papers with her lawyer and caseworker the next day. She had her best friend with her since she knew it would probably be the hardest day of her life. She survived by planning to make her farewell visit with Ryan the best possible.

Discuss the story together.

6 8

12. Try to balance the parent's need for finality with the child's need for enough time to say good-bye and to feel comfortable with her new home.

13. Know that younger children may not be able to handle transitions lasting more than one or two weeks. Older children may need additional time.

YOUR IDEAS

Your Story

What does your child need to hear from you?

How can you best help your child be ready for adoption?

How can you help your child as you say good-bye?

When do you want to sign the final papers?

Who can help you most through this painful time?

9

63

DON'T FORGET

- ✓ Past hurts can't be changed.
- ✓ Children can heal with help.
- ✓ Parents can help children heal.
- ✓ Adults pulling together help.
- ✓ Planned visits help.
- ✓ Past failures don't negate good decisions now.
- ✓ Empower parents to help kids make the transition.
- ✓ Let parents help plan the sequence.
- ✓ Recognize that timing is important.
- ✓ Let timing follow people's needs.

Issue 23

PRACTICE TIPS

1. As in Issues 20 and 22, talk to the child, and make a list of what the child needs to hear.

2. Let the child know, "This is what you *want* to hear. I can't promise it's what you *will* hear."

3. If the parent does say hurtful things during the visit, stop him.

4. Talk to the child after the visit. Example: "We talked about your dad's problems. He's still not able to take the step of seeing to your needs. I wish it hadn't happened."

5. Prepare the parent. The better prepared the parent is, the less likely he is to fall into hurtful patterns.

6. Acknowledge to the parent that you know he wants the best for his child.

7. Help the parent to believe he can give his best for a half-hour visit.

8. Using plans made in discussing Issues 20 and 22, write down what the parent wants (plans) to say.

9. Follow-up with a letter to the parent before the visit summarizing the messages the two of you "agreed would be helpful." Ask the parent to acknowledge the letter.

10. If the parent will not be able to verbalize the message well, have him write a letter to give to his child during the visit.

11. Be diplomatic but make sure the letter is phrased well. Say, "Your child might interpret this the wrong way." Work on the wording of the letter together.

12. Describe things that could happen during the visit (e.g., "People may cry because saying good-bye is not easy").

13. Plan the visit to last for about 20-30 minutes. Have the visit in a room without distractions.

14. Coach the parent, if needed. To the child, "Your dad wanted to tell you...." To the parent, "Is that right?" (Turn to the parent for acknowledgment.) Whatever the parent can do to free the child and affirm lasting love will be the child's best therapy.

Good-bye Ceremony

ISSUE 23

The hardest thing in the world for Shayla was signing Whitney's adoption papers. Shayla had been seeing Whitney twice a month. Now the minimum in her adoption agreement was once a year. Whitney's new parents said they wanted to get together more often, but Shayla knew it depended on many things that were hard for her to promise.

A few days after she signed the papers, Shayla went for her farewell visit with Whitney. She brought her daughter a teddy bear wearing a shirt that said "I love you." Whitney gave her mom a picture she drew.

Shayla told Whitney she wanted her to be happy in her new family, and the problems in their old family were not Whitney's fault. It was okay for her to love another mommy and daddy, and it was especially good that they loved her so much.

Whitney told her mother that her picture was of two houses. She was in one with her new family. Her mother was in the other with her little brother—and there was no drinking or hitting. Whitney pointed to some hearts and said they meant she was thinking of her mother and brother and sending them love.

Shayla told Whitney she would always love and miss her and gave her a letter to keep in her Life Story Book. They said good-bye with some tears and lots of hugs.

Discuss the story together.

6 10

15. Make sure the child understands. For example, ask the child, "Do you understand your dad wants you to love your new parents?"

16. Have the parent affirm that he will always love, care about, and miss the child.

17. Place a letter from the parent in the child's Life Story Book. However short, it will become a lifelong treasure.

YOUR IDEAS

Your Story

What do you want most in your farewell visit?

_____

_____

_____

What do you hope to hear from your child?

_____

_____

_____

What can you say to him or her?

_____

_____

_____

What can you write to put in your child's Life Story Book?

_____

_____

_____

Can you handle it if you or your child starts crying?

_____

_____

_____

11

DON'T FORGET

- ✓ Prepare the child for the good-bye visit.
- ✓ Prepare the parent for the visit.
- ✓ Follow planning with a written summary.
- ✓ Have the parent write a letter if he can't say what he needs to.
- ✓ Set realistic expectations.
- ✓ Plan a short visit with no distractions.
- ✓ Affirm that the child's best therapy is the parent's message.
- ✓ Coach the parent when needed.
- ✓ Suggest that the first message needed is "freeing," and the second message is that the parent will always love the child.

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Issue 24

PRACTICE TIPS

1. Acknowledge the differences between physical and emotional pain.
   - If someone is physically hurt, people call a doctor, put on a cast, take sick leave, and talk about it.
   - If someone is in pain emotionally, people usually don't know what to do.
2. Recognize that abusive parents are typically numb from years of pain and hurt that were not acknowledged or healed.
3. See anger as our society's most acceptable expression of emotional pain.
4. Know that anger can turn into lashing-out at those to whom we are closest or those who are most vulnerable. The abusive parent losing a child has a new grief that can easily turn into additional anger and abuse.
5. Caution the parent that numbing her pain with alcohol or drugs makes hurting others more likely.
6. Give the parent the choice of using the new loss as a chance to start healing or to fall into old patterns of abusing herself and others.
7. Assist the parent who is in emotional pain by acknowledging her loss, then helping her plan to get support for her healing.
8. Find a group, religious organization, class, or simple book that teaches healing from loss in a manner appropriate for the parent. Commit to seeing the parent through the first step.*
9. Emphasize that healing emotional pain can never happen alone. The parent will need a counselor, a friend, or a group committed to helping her do whatever it takes to heal.
10. Stress the need for complete honesty. Complete honesty in the safety of total confidentiality is crucial.
11. Encourage and allow the release of crying, shaking, or shouting when sadness, fear, or anger hits.
12. Teach the parent how making a "loss history" list of her whole life is a start for healing old hurts.*

Grief, Loss, and Healing

ISSUE 24

After the good-bye visit, Shayla felt like Whitney had died. She had a feeling in her chest that hurt more than anything ever had. If it hadn't been for her baby, she said she would have gone back to drinking with her old friends to try to forget.

Shayla's counselor asked if she had ever felt like this before. She remembered when she was three and her mom had left her with her grandmother. After her grandmother died, Shayla had to live with different relatives and sometimes with her mother and her boyfriends. Some of them abused her. When she was a teenager she started drinking and running away.

Shayla and her counselor did a "loss history" together so Shayla could look back over her life and see how her old losses were still affecting her. They made a list of what helped her most now and what she had wished for then.

She practiced saying good-bye to Whitney and asking her to forgive her for not being the kind of mom she needed. She worked on forgiving all the people in her life who had hurt her.

Shayla started going to church again and found strength there to face her pain. She began slowly building a better life for herself and her baby.

Discuss the story together.

6 12

13. Point out how losses are minimized for children. Children know how to grieve and heal until they get stopped by adults.

14. Our society makes healing difficult with countless wrong messages. List those messages.

15. Know that healing is the biggest challenge we can face. The reward is finding joy in our lives.

* See *How To Survive the Loss of A Love* and *The Grief Recovery Handbook* in the "Sources and Resources" Section of this manual.

Your Story

Do you recognize the kind of pain that comes with loss?

_____

_____

_____

Have you felt this kind of grief before?

_____

_____

_____

How did people react to your feelings then?

_____

_____

_____

How do you want them to act now when you feel bad?

_____

_____

_____

Is there anything you don't want to do when you feel bad?

_____

_____

_____

13

YOUR IDEAS

DON'T FORGET

- ✓ Acknowledge that people know what to do with physical crises, but people don't know how to deal well with emotional pain.
- ✓ See anger as society's most acceptable reaction.
- ✓ Acknowledge the parent's loss.
- ✓ Help the parent plan for dealing with her pain.
- ✓ Establish a "loss history" to give perspective.
- ✓ Don't discuss children's losses.
- ✓ Acknowledge that others often make it difficult to heal from loss.

Issue 25

PRACTICE TIPS

1. Ask the parent, "In the time since the placement, what do you miss most?"

2. Encourage the parent to be specific. Take notes and refer to those notes as you talk.

3. Ask the parent to tell you all of the things that have helped him cope with missing his child. Make a list that the parent can take with him. Encourage him to refer to it often.

4. Ask the parent if anything has made his loss harder.

5. Go back to the first workbook, *A Child's Needs*, especially Issue 4, *What Gives Me Strength*.

6. Find out how well support and counseling is working for the parent.

7. Talk again about how much work it is to heal from a loss, especially when the parent has to heal from many past hurts as well.

8. Help the parent feel pride in whatever steps he has taken, no matter how small.

9. Explore whether the parent has been able to forgive himself at all. Can he begin to imagine himself as a good person?

10. Introduce the idea that relationships change. Explore changes in past relationships.

11. Discuss how the parent's relationship to his child has changed.

12. Encourage the parent to think about whether any of these changes feels positive.

13. Find out what the parent wants most for the child. How can he help bring it about? What will he need to do to build a positive relationship with the child that can grow and last over the years?

14. Explore how a good relationship with the adoptive parents can help.

New Relationships

ISSUE 25

The first letter Loni got from the parents who adopted her three children made her cry. She was happy they were doing so well but terribly sad she couldn't be with them.

Sometimes Loni felt that if she couldn't have her kids, she just wanted to forget them. Other times she would come home and expect them to be there. When she got together with her sisters and friends and their kids it felt strange not having her kids, too. It helped her to be in a support group with other moms who were not with their children either.

Her feelings of guilt about how she had damaged her children hurt her the most. She wasn't successful all the time with her alcohol and drug treatment, but she worked with her counselor on forgiving herself.

Writing to the older children helped Loni begin building a new kind of relationship with them. Writing and calling the adoptive parents occasionally was another challenge. Her goal was to build a relationship with the adoptive family that could last through the good and bad times in the years ahead.

Discuss the story together.

65

14

15. Explore what the parent need to do to build a good relationship.
    - What preparation by the parent will be crucial for any visits, phone calls, or letters?
    - What does the parent need to watch out for?
16. Explore the realistic possibilities, hopes, and dreams for the parent's future.
17. Work together to help the parent plan ways he can move toward his dream.

YOUR IDEAS

Your Story

What do you miss most without your child?

_____

_____

_____

Can you imagine a different relationship with your child?

_____

_____

_____

What do you want most for your child?

_____

_____

_____

What can you do to help make that happen?

_____

_____

_____

How can you build a good relationship with the adoptive family?

_____

_____

_____

15

DON'T FORGET

- ✓ Find out what the parent misses most.
- ✓ Make a list of what helps and what makes things harder.
- ✓ Check in with progress on healing.
- ✓ Affirm that forgiving oneself is a job that takes work.
- ✓ Talk about past relationships that have changed.
- ✓ Uncover how this relationship has changed.
- ✓ Discuss what is most important for the child.
- ✓ Focus on realistic hopes for the future.
- ✓ Make plans to move toward the dreams.

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Appendix

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Introduction

The resources contained in this appendix are based on Oregon law and regulations and were created for the Cooperative Adoption Mediation Project (CAMP) on which *Mediating Permanency Outcomes* is based. CAMP was made possible by a grant to Children's Services of Oregon from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children, Youth and Families, Washington, D.C. (Grant No. 90C00631/01)(1993). These materials and forms are provided as resources to those undertaking the process set out in *Mediating Permanency Outcomes*. They should be adapted to the laws, regulations, and needs of the state in which they are being used.

Oregon State Guidelines and Expectations

I. Oregon Family Unity Model

Purpose: Strengthen families and increase safety, security and stability for children.

This model is based on the conviction that:

- Strengthening and preservation of the family is of critical importance to a healthy society.
- Children deserve to be protected and nurtured.
- Children are best protected when families are strong.
- Helping need not be mysterious or difficult.
- Looking for problems and giving advice weakens people.
- Building on strengths and co-creating options strengthens people.
- Looking for and building on strengths is an advanced skill.

Values and Beliefs (the Foundation of the Model):

- Families have strengths and can change. They deserve respect. Families have wisdom and solutions. Families and communities are our best resource.
- Strengths are what ultimately resolve issues of concern. It is important to set up opportunities for families to show their strengths.
- Strengths are discovered through listening, noticing and paying attention to people.
- Strengths are enhanced when they are acknowledged and encouraged.
- People gain a sense of hope when they are listened to. People are more inclined to listen to others if they are listened to.
- Options are preferable to advice. Advice is basically disrespectful. Options provide choices. Choices empower. Advice disempowers.
- Empowering people is preferable to controlling them.
- A consultant is more helpful to people than a boss. It is important to remember *we work with and for* the family, the family does not work for us.

II. Children's Services Division Permanency and Family Continuity

Vision: Valuing, establishing and maintaining lifetime families for children.

Definition: Intensive time-limited casework to build and maintain a stable and nurturing lifetime family for a child while preserving connections among family members and establishing safety.

Key Features:

- A philosophy highlighting the primacy of birth families, the value of rearing children in family settings, and importance of maintaining connections between a youngster and kin.
- Partnerships with parents and extended families.
- Working with parents to facilitate decision making for their child's lifetime family by presenting all possible permanency options early in the case.
- Culturally and developmentally appropriate out-of-home care services.
- A focus on honesty, systematic planning and prompt, decisive and respectful actions.
- Case management which emphasizes differential diagnosis, family reunification activities provided concurrently with alternative permanency options, early gathering and documenting information, intensive services to parents, frequent parental visiting, case reviews, service agreements, participation of family members in case decisions and plans, building on the strengths of families, adoption preparation and support services, and superior and consistent legal consultation and representation.
- Organizational integration between child protection, family preservation, foster care and adoption.
- Active collaboration among various community agencies, family members, lawyers, judges and others important to family members.

- Family meetings as tools for assessment, family involvement and empowerment.
- Child specific services to help children handle emotional trauma of abuse, neglect, exposure to violence, grief, loss, broken attachments, and movements from family to family in foster care and adoption.

III. Concurrent Permanency Casework

Purpose: To achieve resolution of the permanency plan by establishing a lifetime family for a child as soon as possible.

Definition: Implementing the service plan for reunification at the same time as developing a back-up plan, in case it is needed to achieve permanency.

Components:

- Differential Diagnosis: The process and basis for discerning which families have the potential to reunify versus families who are unlikely to reunify. Presupposes "up front" assessment of information including safety issues, social history, child welfare, people with legal rights, extended family members, "expert" evaluations, family strengths, etc. Essential to select and target services which will be most likely to result in reunification.
- Full Disclosure: Explaining all options and choices for permanency to parents very soon after placement occurs. Explaining the harm to children that accompanies separation from parents and living in foster care. Repeating permanency options from time to time.
- Visitation: Planning frequent and quality contacts. Explain to parents how important visits are to their children and why maintaining attachment between parents and child is critical to successful reunification.
- Plan A and Plan B: Concurrent planning. Considering reunification simultaneously with other permanency alternatives. Focus is stability and family continuity for the child. Talk to extended family and hold family unity meetings early in case. Also consider, can the foster placement become the adoptive family if the plan resolves this way?
- Written Agreements: Make clear what is expected to achieve reunification. Done in some steps. Parents always involved in developing the agreement. Agreements can be an outcome of a family unity meeting and are regularly updated.
- Behavior not Promises: Whatever happens is based on what the parents do, not say. Look for signs of ambivalence and talk to parents about what they do which does not fit with what they say.
- Forensic Social Work: Testify about observations and opinions in court.
- Redefine Success: Reunification is success. Success is also achieving permanency in a reasonable amount of time along with maintaining family connections.

IV. CSD Guidelines for Accepting Permanent Custody of Children

Legal Basis for Adoption Services

Children's Services Division is authorized by law to accept permanent custody of children for the purpose of planning adoption. Permanent custody can be conveyed to CSD by:

- a permanent commitment order from the juvenile court following the termination of parental rights;
- a voluntary release and surrender agreement signed by the child's parent; or
- an order of guardianship from the probate court when the child's parent is deceased and no relative has assumed guardianship of the child.

Legal Impact of a Release and Surrender Agreement

A release and surrender agreement does not have the same impact as an order of termination of parental rights. A release and surrender agreement gives CSD guardianship authority over a child. It allows CSD to place a child for adoption and consent to the adoption on behalf of the parent. However, the parent's rights and responsibilities to the child are not terminated until a decree of adoption is granted. The agreement

can be revoked by the parent if the child has not been physically placed for adoption or in the case of an Indian child at any time up to the order of adoption. However, CSD cannot revoke the agreement.

If CSD accepts a release and surrender agreement, then the agency is responsible for the child until the child is adopted or the court takes guardianship away from CSD or the child reaches the age of majority. Although the parent's rights and responsibilities are not terminated under the law, by CSD administrative rule, the agreement relieves the parent of responsibility to support the child or provide for the child in any way.

Impact of Termination of Parental Rights Order

A termination of parental rights is forever. Once final, it cannot be undone for any reason. The order not only terminates parent's rights, it also terminates child's right to support, survivorship benefits, and inheritance. If the child is not adopted, the state has made the child a legal orphan.

Policy for Accepting Permanent Custody:

- Adoption plans shall only be initiated for a child who meets all four of the following criteria for adoption planning:
- Adoption is in the child's best interest;
- The child can be legally freed for adoption;
- The child can be successfully placed for adoption; and
- The child can accept new parents, and, if age 14 or older, will legally consent to the adoption.
- In order to free a child for adoption, the proposed plan must be carefully reviewed to be certain that the plan is appropriate for the child and it is reasonable to believe that the plan can be accomplished.
- Adoption plans, once approved, shall be initiated immediately and diligently pursued to completion to assure that the child is adopted at the earliest age possible.

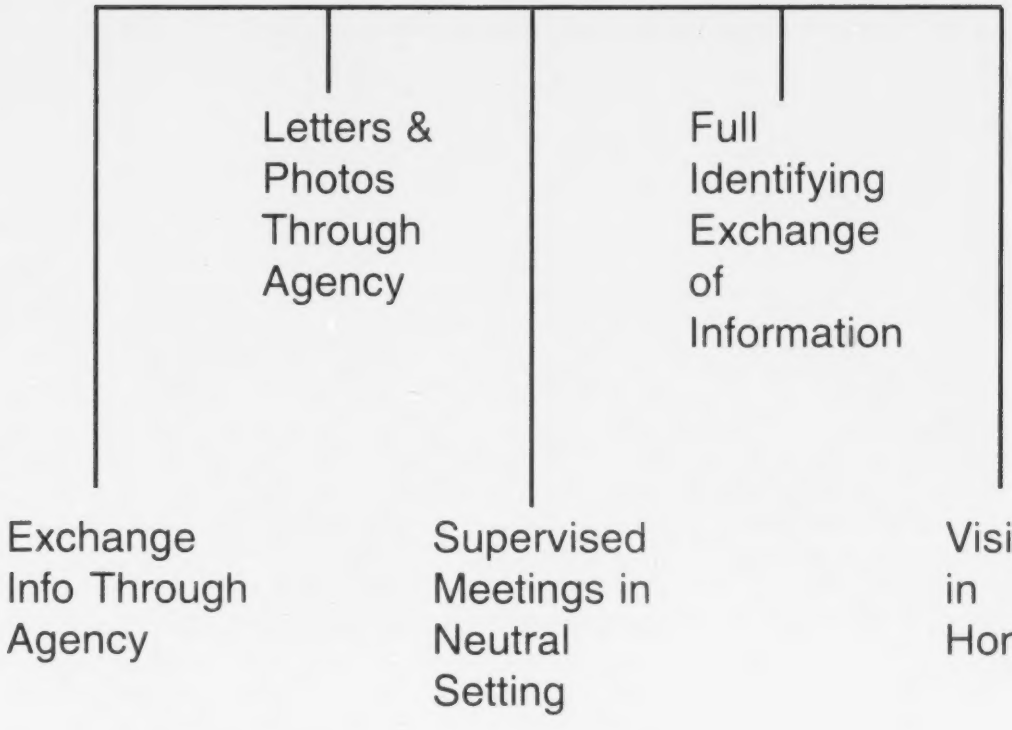
Rationale for Policy

- Occasionally CSD is asked to accept a release and surrender agreement for a child or pursue termination of parental rights when there is no plan to place the child for adoption. Such requests are contrary to the legal and philosophical premises of good practice in adoption services and in conflict with CSD's values for preserving families.
- CSD does not want to assume the position of using termination of parental rights in order to punish parents, no matter how heinous the parent's behavior or how difficult they are to deal with on an ongoing basis. There are criminal penalties available to punish parents for heinous acts and other legal remedies, such as protective orders, available to protect a child from destructive parental contact.
- We are aware that the court can terminate a parent's rights if there are grounds for termination, and it is in the child's best interest. As a general principle, CSD believes it is not in a child's best interest to take away a child's legal birthrights, i.e., to have a parent, to claim financial support, to inherit, and to be part of a family.
- There may be isolated instances where termination of parental rights without adoption is in the child's best interest. This is a matter for the courts to decide. However, CSD does not want to be put in the position of using the limited resources of CSD and the courts for this purpose while other children have to wait to be freed for adoption. Furthermore, CSD does not want to relieve the parent of responsibility to provide for the child and deny the child support and survivorship benefits.

In summary, the state itself cannot be a "good parent." If the state cannot provide a child a responsible parent, then the state should not take away the child's legal ties to an inadequate parent.

References:
ORS 418.270-418.285
ORS 419B.500-419B.530
Attorney General Opinion 5967
Oregon Administrative Rule 412-21-195

COOPERATIVE ADOPTION CHOICES


Letters & Photos Through Agency
Full Identifying Exchange of Information
Exchange Info Through Agency
Supervised Meetings in Neutral Setting
Visits in Homes

PLAN A: FOSTER PARENTS OR RELATIVES

PLAN B: YEARLY MEETINGS INCLUDING CHILD

PLAN C: YEARLY MEETINGS WITHOUT CHILD

PLAN D: EXCHANGE LETTERS ONLY

TRADITIONAL: NO CONTACT

Adoption Teamwork of Oregon

Jeanne Etter, Ph.D., Consultant, Mediator

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Comfort Level Worksheet for Adoptive Parents

for _____

submitted on: _____

Suggestions for use: Cooperative adoptions may become the norm in CSD for birth parents planning voluntary relinquishments. When parents help in planning an adoption for their children, some level of openness is likely to be part of the plan. After you have had a chance to learn about cooperative adoptions, please indicate the greatest level of openness with which you would feel comfortable with birth parents you feel positive about. You will not be asked to work cooperatively with birth parents you feel negative about and you will not be asked to move beyond the comfort level you have indicated. You will always have the option of rejecting any potential adoption that does not seem right for your family.

Please check your current wishes. Be open to discussing your choices with your adoption worker and revising the form as your ideas change. Remember that you will only be considered for children and adoptions within the range you define as your comfort level.

When the birth parent requests it, what communication is acceptable?

1. What level of written communication?

[ ] none [ ] correspond through agency [ ] correspond directly

2. What type of telephone communication?

[ ] none [ ] calls arranged through agency [ ] calls direct

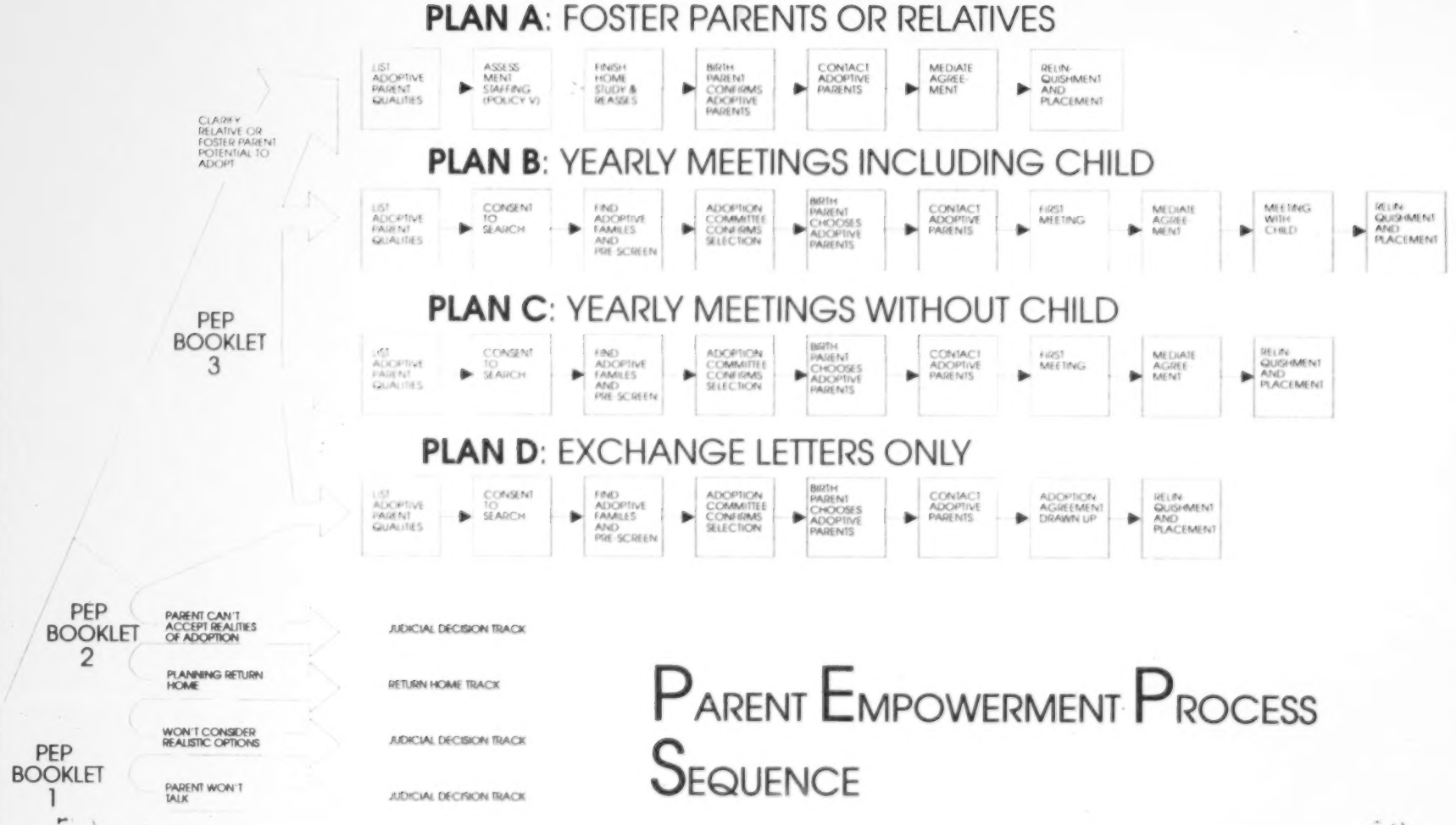
3. What kind of meetings after placement?

[ ] none [ ] with extended family only [ ] w. birthparent in a neutral setting [ ] w. birth parent in the home

4. How many meetings a year (in a written agreement)?

[ ] none [ ] one a year [ ] two a year [ ] up to _____ a year

Is there anything else we should know about what you want in your potential adoption?


PLAN A: FOSTER PARENTS OR RELATIVES
LIST ADOPTIVE PARENT QUALITIES
ASSESS MENT STAFFING (POLICY V)
FINISH HOME STUDY & RELEASES
BIRTH PARENT CONFIRMS ADOPTIVE PARENTS
CONTACT ADOPTIVE PARENTS
MEDIATE AGREE-MENT
RELIN-QUISHMENT AND PLACEMENT
CLARIFY RELATIVE OR FOSTER PARENT POTENTIAL TO ADOPT
PLAN B: YEARLY MEETINGS INCLUDING CHILD
LIST ADOPTIVE PARENT QUALITIES
CONSENT TO SEARCH
FIND ADOPTIVE FAMILES AND PSE SCREEN
ADOPTION COMMITTEE CONFIRMS SELECTION
BIRTH PARENT CHOOSES ADOPTIVE PARENTS
CONTACT ADOPTIVE PARENTS
FIRST MEETING
MEDIATE AGREE MENT
MEETING WITH CHILD
RELIN-QUISHMENT AND PLACEMENT
PEP BOOKLET 3
PLAN C: YEARLY MEETINGS WITHOUT CHILD
LIST ADOPTIVE PARENT QUALITIES
CONSENT TO SEARCH
FIND ADOPTIVE FAMILES AND PSE SCREEN
ADOPTION COMMITTEE CONFIRMS SELECTION
BIRTH PARENT CHOOSES ADOPTIVE PARENTS
CONTACT ADOPTIVE PARENTS
FIRST MEETING
MEDIATE AGREE MENT
RELIN-QUISHMENT AND PLACEMENT
PLAN D: EXCHANGE LETTERS ONLY
LIST ADOPTIVE PARENT QUALITIES
CONSENT TO SEARCH
FIND ADOPTIVE FAMILES AND PSE SCREEN
ADOPTION COMMITTEE CONFIRMS SELECTION
BIRTH PARENT CHOOSES ADOPTIVE PARENTS
CONTACT ADOPTIVE PARENTS
ADOPTION AGREEMENT DRAWN UP
RELIN-QUISHMENT AND PLACEMENT
PEP BOOKLET 2
PARENT CAN'T ACCEPT REALITIES OF ADOPTION
JUDICIAL DECISION TRACK
PLANNING RETURN HOME
RETURN HOME TRACK
PEP BOOKLET 1
WON'T CONSIDER REALISTIC OPTIONS
JUDICIAL DECISION TRACK
PARENT WON'T TALK
JUDICIAL DECISION TRACK
PARENT EMPOWERMENT PROCESS SEQUENCE

Adoption Teamwork of Oregon

Jeanne Etter, Ph.D., Consultant, Mediator

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C.A.M.P. Mediator Selection Qualifications

CAMP Mediator Panel:

Child welfare mediators for the Cooperative Adoption Mediation Project will work on cases referred by CSD permanent planning workers from the two pilot test sites through the mediation supervisor. They will mediate situations that have become adversarial and work toward a cooperative plan with a written agreement for the child(ren)'s future which is acceptable to all of the parties directly involved.

A panel will be developed of not more than 10 child welfare mediators who meet the qualifications described below. Because the group of mediators needs to reflect the cultural diversity of the special needs children and parents served by the project, five panel positions will be reserved for mediator specialists who demonstrate knowledge, understanding and experience in working with individuals, families and communities of color, especially African-Americans, Hispanics, Asians and Indians.

Each mediator will submit a profile as part of their proposal which includes qualifications, experience, areas of expertise and hourly fee (suggested between $50 and $100 per hour). They will indicate the geographic area they are willing to serve and any other requirements. The mediation supervisor will assign mediators based on the needs of the case and the capabilities of the mediators and will oversee and supervise their progress.

Referral Process:

Permanent planning caseworkers in the pilot project branches will determine which experimental group cases are ready for referral to mediation using the CAMP criteria. Upon referral, the mediation supervisor will review and assign the case to an appropriate mediator. The assigned mediator will meet with the caseworker to review the case and CSD parameters, sign an agreement to mediate which provides for confidentiality, and make an appointment to be introduced to the birth parent.

The mediator will meet the birth parent, briefly discuss the parent's needs and determine whether the parent wishes to continue with the mediator. The mediator will then make appropriate appointments for caucus sessions with the parent and others involved (such as attorneys and other family members).

Before beginning, the birth parent will be informed about the mediation process, his or her rights and responsibilities, and be asked to sign an agreement to mediate which provides for the confidentiality of the process. The first meetings will typically be individual caucus sessions with the birth parent(s) to assist him or her in self-examination, consideration of options and decision making.

Once the birth parent indicates readiness to negotiate a cooperative plan regarding the future of the child, the mediator will arrange joint sessions as needed with CSD and/or prospective adoptive parents. The case will be considered to be successfully resolved when a written agreement covering the plan for the child's future has been signed by the birth parent(s) and other parties directly involved.

C.A.M.P. Child Welfare Mediator Qualifications
Sections 1 - 6

Section 1. Family Related Services Minimum Qualifications:
-At least two years of experience in the broad field of child welfare or family welfare related services. (We are looking for direct client contact with high-risk parents and dysfunctional families in any setting.)
-Training (or experience judged to be the equivalent) as follows:
Dynamics of child abuse and domestic violence - 5 hours
Dynamics of alcohol and drug abuse - 5 hours

Section 2. Adoption Minimum Qualifications *by September 1, 1993*:
-At least 10 hours of experience and/or training in adoption counseling of birth parents, 10 hours experience or training in adoptive parent education, and 10 hours experience or training in cooperative or open adoption planning. (Limited internships will be available for those who need to add this experience by September 1, 1993.)

Section 3a. *Introductory* CAMP Mediation Minimum Qualifications *by September 1, 1993* (C.A.M.P. can assist with locating resources to complete requirements.)
-At least 30 hours of basic mediation training (as described in Oregon Administrative Rules OAR 718-30-050, sections 1 and 2) or the equivalent.

-At least 30 hours of mediation experience in at least 3 domestic relations (family) cases and a report from the supervising mediator. (Limited internships available.)

-Membership in a professional mediation association (Academy of Family Mediators or the Oregon Mediation Association), which includes agreement to meet standards of mediator conduct.

-Professional liability insurance (can be through AFM) for all mediation activities.

Section 3b. CAMP Mediator Minimum Qualifications *by January 1, 1994*:
-All of the above qualifications *plus the minimum qualifications for domestic relations mediators on court panels as described by the Oregon Administrative Rules, Chapter 718, Division 40, April 1993 revision.* C.A.M.P. will assist in networking with available resources to help mediators reach these goals.
Key points of the court qualifications include:
-An additional 24 hours of family mediation training beyond the 30-hour basic training (the CAMP 15-hour training should apply) or a 40-hour combined basic and domestic relations training.
-Six hours of training in the court system.

Section 4. Cultural Competency Minimum Qualifications *by September 1, 1993*:
-Demonstrated knowledge, sensitivity and understanding of cultural issues from at least 15 hours of direct experience (or a combination of training and experience) working with individuals, families and communities of color. Bilingual ability is an asset.

Section 5. Court System Minimum Qualifications *by September 1, 1993*:
-Observation and written report of at least one Termination of Parental Rights court case in any Oregon court.

-Participation in at least two cases involving family issues in the Oregon court system.

-Commitment to six hours of court system mediator training (if not already qualified) by January 1, 1994, as listed above in Section 3b.

Section 6. Capability Qualifications:
-Commitment to be available on the CAMP panel of mediators for one year including attending all training and supervision meetings without payment. (Overhead costs for mediator nonbillable hours should be built into mediator hourly fees. Billable hours will be those directly related to completion of a referred case.)

-Demonstration of having the time, resources, and ability to complete assignments in a timely and responsible manner.

-Completed proposal and profile describing related experience and training, including dates, trainers' and supervisors' names, educational background, current areas of specialty and expertise, areas of interest, professional organization memberships, hourly fees, and geographic availability.

CAMP Child Welfare Mediator Job Description

-Completion of CAMP specialized 15-hour Cooperative Adoption Mediation Training.

-Participation in CAMP monthly supervision/consultation group for 12 months; being evaluated after four months by the selection committee to determine whether the mediator will continue to be included on the panel of mediators.

-Timely and responsible completion of cases referred by CAMP.

-Individual oversight and report preparation as required by mediation supervisor and CAMP.

General requirements:

-The ability to defuse hostility and engage difficult clients in self-examination and decision making related to parenting and adoption issues.

-The ability to operate in a complex organization and work within the parameters of CSD, the court system, and cooperative adoption practice.

-The ability to work sensitively and effectively across cultures.

C.A.M.P. Referral Guidelines for use of Child Welfare Mediator Panel

Caseworkers may refer parents to mediation who have entered their permanent planning caseload between June 1, 1993, and March 1, 1994, who fit one of these categories: (A case is appropriate for referral no matter what outcome is expected.)

1. Parent is in conflict with CSD in a way that makes cooperation impossible.
   a. Legal conflict means they cannot work with the caseworker.
   b. Individual conflict means they won't work with CSD.
   c. Parent and CSD have tried work ing together but have reached an impasse.

2. Parent is interested in a cooperative adoption but problems stand in the way.
   a. Parent wants a plan that is unrealistic or unacceptable to CSD.
   b. Parent wants an adoptions but the family is against it.
   c. Parent or CSD is in conflict with the foster parents about the plan.

3. A cooperative adoption is planned, and details between birth and adoptive relatives need mediation.

Caseworkers should *not* refer parents whose case fits one of these categories:

1. A judicial decision will be required because:
   a. Parent is not legally competent.
   b. Parent is not present.
   c. Parent poses a clear danger in a cooperative plan.
   d. Parent is completely uncooperative.
   e. Parent can't make visits work.

2. The child is not appropriate for cooperative adoption.
   a. CSD won't take a relinquishment. (see *Practice Manual* notes)
   b. Child may be unplaceable.
   c. Placement parameters are too restrictive.

3. There are no issues to mediate.

Cooperative Adoption Mediation Project (C.A.M.P.)

MEDIATION REFERRAL FORM

Attach ICDB

Date: _____ PP Date: _____

Case Name: _____ Case No. _____

Reason for Referral: _____

TPR Filed? _____

Describe Work Done With Birth Parent(s) and Their Response: _____

CSD Non-Negotiable Parameters: _____

Other Information: _____

Worker's Signature: _____ Date: _____
Branch: _____ Telephone Number: _____
Supervisor's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Assigned To: _____ Date: _____
Mediation Supervisor: _____ Date of Referral: _____

Date: _____

RE: _____

Dear Attorney:

I am writing to request your support for allowing your client to fill out a short questionnaire (sample enclosed) as part of a pilot project to test our Parent Empowerment Process (PEP) materials. The materials were created through the Cooperative Adoption Mediation Project, which is funded by a Federal Grant.

The Cooperative Adoption Mediation Project (C.A.M.P.) is exploring ways to work cooperatively with parents to make permanent plans for their child(ren) rather than court termination of parental rights.

Clients being asked to complete questionnaires are those who have entered a permanent placement caseload after March 1, 1993. Your client's answers to the questionnaire will be seen only by the independent evaluator, Terri Heath, Ph.D. The questionnaire will be mailed directly to her; no CSD personnel will have access to the completed forms.

Part of the group of clients completing questionnaires will be offered an opportunity to use PEP workbooks. Should your client be in this group, we invite you to participate in those sessions with your client.

In addition, some clients may be referred to outside mediators. Mediation referrals would be made only to C.A.M.P. Child Welfare Mediators who are experienced with child welfare issues and have had special training in the C.A.M.P. process. The mediator's goal will be help the parent(s), CSD, and any other parties directly involved come to agreement about a permanent home for the child(ren).

We will keep you informed about your client's participation. If you would like to be present when your client completes the questionnaire or if you have questions, please contact the following mediator:

_____

_____

Sincerely,

Branch Manager
Children's Services Division
Oregon Department of Human Resources

8

The Mediation Center

1158 High Street, Suite 202 - Eugene, OR 97401 - (503) 345-1456 Fax (503) 345-4024

November 8, 1993

Jeanne Etter, Ph.D., Principal Investigator
Cooperative Adoption Mediation Project

Diana Roberts, Director
Cooperative Adoption Mediation Project
Adoption Manager
Children's Services Division
Salem, OR 97310

RE: Confidentiality of C.A.M.P. Mediation
(Preventing Mediators From Being Required to Testify)

ORS 36.205 confirms that all mediators in the State of Oregon, and their clients, are entitled to confidential mediation discussions upon entering into a written agreement that provides for the confidentiality of their mediation. Having reviewed a copy of C.A.M.P.'s Agreement to Mediate, C.A.M.P. plainly provides for the confidentiality of C.A.M.P. mediation discussions.

ORS 36.205 is the one provision of ORS Chapter 36 that applies to all mediators and mediation clients in the State of Oregon. The balance of Chapter 36 applies to community and court mediators in programs that receive state funding. The legislative history on ORS 36.205 is that all mediators and mediation clients in Oregon are to be protected if there is a written confidentiality agreement.

In addition, independent bases exist for confidentiality of C.A.M.P. mediation discussions, including oral contract; settlement negotiations (Oregon Evidence Code 408); and common law privilege (Oregon Evidence Code 415). It is not necessary, however, to apply these legal doctrines since ORS 36.205 is so clear under circumstances where a written agreement exists providing for confidentiality of mediation.

ORS 36.205 provides for confidentiality (assuming a written agreement has been executed) unless that confidentiality is waived by the parties in writing. Even with such a waiver, the mediator still retains his or her independent right to refuse to testify in court. Mediation confidentiality, in this sense, is broader than traditional privilege since the mediator can independently make a claim of confidentiality. This confidentiality pertains to court and other contested proceedings.

I hope this information is helpful.

James C. Melamed, J.D.
Chair, Oregon Dispute Resolution Committee
Former Executive Director, Academy of Family Mediators

Agreement For Confidentiality

This is an Agreement that _____, mediator, may enter into confidential discussions with _____ in order to complete a questionnaire for research purposes.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and I may choose to withdraw at any time. I understand that only the research evaluator, Dr. Terri Heath, will have identifying information regarding my answers to the questionnaire and that my answers will be kept confidential. I acknowledge that I can choose to be paid a small honorarium ($5) for filling out the questionnaire.

I agree that any meetings with the mediator shall be confidential between myself and the mediator. (The one exception would be that if any new information regarding injury or potential injury to a child came up, it would be shared with Children's Services Division of Oregon.) Any notes or information from our discussions will not be admissible in any court, legal or administrative proceedings. I agree not to call the mediator to testify concerning any of our discussions or to provide any materials in any court proceeding.

I have read the above statement and agree to participate:

_____

Name [please print]

_____ _____

Signature Date

revised 10/11/93

CLIENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Type of Test _____
Date _____
Branch _____

Family Case # _____

This is family's [1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, ____] Permanent Planning Session.

Relation of person completing form to the child is _____
CSD Person Letter Code _____

Is a copy of ICDB form enclosed? ❑
CSD Worker Name _____ **& Phone Number** _____

Please listen to each question as the CSD worker reads it out loud. Then answer the question to the best of your ability. After you have finished all the questions, please fold the questionnaire in the envelope provided, seal it completely, and give it to the CSD worker to mail for you.

1. Read the seven statements below and think about yourself and how you feel. How well does each statement describe you? For each statement, circle the number closest to how much the statement is like you.

	A LOT LIKE ME	A LITTLE LIKE ME	NOT LIKE ME
a. There is no way I can solve some of the problems I have.	1	2	3
b. I feel that I'm being pushed around in life.	1	2	3
c. I have little control over the things that happen to me.	1	2	3
d. I can do anything I really set my mind to.	1	2	3
e. I feel helpless in dealing with the problems of life.	1	2	3
f. What happens to me in the future depends on me.	1	2	3
g. There is little I can do to change the important things in my life.	1	2	3

2. For each item, circle the number that is closest to the way you feel.

a. When I have to get things done, I feel:	Things will always get done	Maybe things will get done	There is almost no chance things will get done
	1	2	3
b. When I face a tough problem, I feel:	I will solve the whole problem	I might solve part of the problem	There is no hope of solving the problem
	1	2	3

	SATISFIED	NEUTRAL	NOT SATISFIED
3. How satisfied are you with your progress with CSD?	1	2	3
4. How satisfied do you think your CSD worker is with your progress?	1	2	3
5. How satisfied are you with the education or training you have received from CSD so far?	1	2	3

	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE
6. I am very satisfied with my life.	1	2	3
7. CSD staff are generally helpful.	1	2	3
8. CSD staff don't understand my problems.	1	2	3
9. CSD staff are often impatient with me.	1	2	3
10. Some of the CSD staff really understand my problems.	1	2	3
11. The meetings with CSD staff help me feel better about myself.	1	2	3

Thank you for your ideas!

Agreement to Mediate

The process of mediation has been explained to me. I understand that _____, a neutral mediator, will work with all parties, helping them make a cooperative plan regarding the future of _____ that is acceptable to everyone.

I understand that mediation is a voluntary process and I may choose to withdraw at any time.

I understand that the role of the mediator is to help us reach agreement on a plan, not to give legal or expert advice.

I understand that this mediator adheres to the code of ethics established by the Academy of Family Mediators. I understand that the mediator will not reveal anything discussed in mediation without the permission of all parties, except for any new information about an injury or potential injury to a child. After individual meetings, I will inform the mediator of any information I wish to be shared with other parties.

I further agree that I will not call the mediator as an adversarial witness in any legal or administrative proceeding concerning this matter. I agree that I will not subpoena or call for the production of any records, notes, or work product resulting from the mediation except for any written agreement that is signed by all parties.

I have read the above statement and agree to mediate under the direction of:

_____

_____

Name(s) [please print]

_____ _____

Signature Date

_____ _____

Signature Date

CONSENT TO SEARCH

I, , give my consent to Children's Services Division, State of Oregon, to begin a search for an adoptive home for my child, . I am seeking an adoptive family who will agree to some level of post-adoption communication with me.

In seeking an adoptive home, Children's Services Division has my permission to utilize not only their own resources, but also newspaper recruitment, radio, TV, adoption exchanges, and other adoption agencies. I understand that my child's last name will not be used or any other information that would identify the child's parents.

If an appropriate adoptive family is located who will agree to some post-adoption communication, I agree to voluntarily relinquish my parental rights to Children's Services Division.

Dated: _____

_____

_____

Witness: _____

Address: _____

_____

_____

An Unsolicited Letter from Seleana's Birth Mother

I am a 20-year-old drug addict who has a 2-year-old daughter, Seleana, who is being put up for adoption. I used to try and blame CSD, my family, or anyone else but me for this happening. I made some very poor choices. Those choices got my daughter taken away in December of 1992.

CSD was very willing to work with me and help me get my daughter back. Instead of getting myself together, I dove even deeper into the bag to cover the pain I was feeling. It didn't help, it just made matters worse. Yes I love my daughter, but I was very powerless over my addiction, so power-less that I chose the bag over my own daughter.

CSD still worked with me. Finally in March I put myself into treatment. I did great there until two weeks before I was to go to another treatment center with my daughter. I left and relapsed because I figured CSD would give up on me. I was wrong, they still worked with me. They worked with me for almost a year but I wasn't getting anything accomplished, and I was just making things harder for Seleana.

In September 1993, CSD informed me they were going to put Seleana up for adoption. I was devastated. I didn't want to accept it, so I resorted to even more drugs.

In October I was arrested for possession of a controlled substance and ex-felon in possession of a fire arm. When I got out they told me that they had a mediator for my daughter's adoption. I was totally against this and still wouldn't accept it and was determined to fight it and win.

Shortly after that I went on the run. I didn't go to court for my recent charges. I was indicted on some past ones plus I broke my probation. During this time, I got a phone call from the mediator to set up a time to get together. I was on the run from the cops and I was sure that she would turn me in. Kate promised me that she was not affiliated or working for CSD or the police, and getting the process going for the adoption was more important. She promised not to turn me in. Kate met me at a Diary Queen and she kept her promise that day and every other day.

CSD gave me an ultimatum - either go along with the adoption or have my rights terminated.

Kate really opened my eyes and made me see things in a totally different light. She made me realize what is most important, my daughter. She is going to have a chance for a wonderful life and I will get to have some part in that. This is what's best for my daughter. I had to make the right decision, put what I wanted aside, and put her first.

Kate has worked with me through everything, even while I was in jail and while I'm in inpatient drug treatment.

I want this for my daughter and for myself because I know it's what's best for her. I know deep down in my heart it's the right thing and I will never regret doing this. I still get to be a part of her life. I can write, exchange pictures, and when the adoption contract is written up, they'll decide when I can see her and how often. It's usually once a year. I can have written contact with the adoptive family and most of all I know that my daughter is safe and is going to be loved and cared for unconditionally.

If I were to not agree with open adoption, I would not have any of this and I would have no idea where my daughter was.

I hope any other families or single parents going through the same thing I am will be smart and think about want's really more important and what's best for their child.

Mediation has been there to help me through all of this and they are great. Without their organization I would have nothing.

Please think long and hard about this. I did and I'm glad that I made the decision that I did, I hope that you do also.

Sincerely, Angela

An Unsolicited Letter from Sean's Birth Mother

This document is provided of my own free will, and all the information provided is correct and true to the best of my knowledge.

I believe that open adoption is not only a viable option to the current laws, but would be beneficial to most adoptive children as well as biological and adoptive parents. My reasons for this belief are as follows:

My son, Sean, after suffering the problems inherent in the foster parent program of care, was adopted. From the beginning of his placement in foster care and subsequent adoption, I have had a relationship with his adoptive mother. This relationship has proved to be beneficial to me, emotionally, and has provided an avenue of biological family support for Sean. Although I have not personally seen Sean in over 15 years, he receives letters, gifts, and cards from me. As well, I have been able to provide him with baby pictures of himself that have proved important to his well being.

As a result of the guarded openness agreed to by his adoptive mother, Sean has a stable and loving home with them as well as the connection and ancestral continuity provided by me. Therefore, Sean now has the best of both worlds without the feeling of complete loss or yearning for connection.

If I could be there in person to explain these things more fully, the most important thing I could have known would be that in a lot of adoptions there is a tremendous loss not only for the child involved but for the biological parents as well. This guarded open adoption has lessened that loss for both of us, as well as stopping the anguish that accompanies the knowledge held by a child that he has been adopted and the belief he was not wanted or loved. Sean knows from my letters and other communications that circumstances prevented him from being with me and that because I loved him, I choose what I believed was best for him. Therefore, Sean is not in torment over a situation he can do nothing about.

It is important to note that although a policy of open adoption might sound fine, the basis for it truly being good for the child is a stable and friendly relationship between adoptive and biological parents. Sean's adoptive mother and I have enjoyed a wonderful relationship. If this had not been true, I would be more highly concerned about the impact of the adoption on Sean. The adoptive mother knows that she had no need to fear my taking Sean from her because she has provided me a way to love him although I cannot have him with me. If more adoptive and biological parents could have this type of relationship, the adoptive child would not have to lose their birth parents OR the family that they love.

Signed,

Sheri

Adoption Teamwork of Oregon

Jeanne Etter, Ph.D., Consultant, Mediator

85444 Teague Loop · Eugene, OR 97405 · (503) 342-2692

RECRUITMENT OF ADOPTIVE FAMILIES FOR COOPERATIVE PLACEMENTS

For use with potential adoptive resource families either as part of the CSD Bulletin description of the child(ren)'s needs or in direct communication with prospective adoptive families:

This child's birth mother [father] has been working cooperatively with CSD to plan the best possible future for her child(ren). For the sake of her child(ren), she would like to keep a channel of communication open with the adoptive family after the adoption. We think this communication is in the best interests of the child(ren) and that safety can be protected by limiting direct contact to one supervised meeting a year between the birth parent(s) and the adoptive parents. The child(ren) would be included in any meetings when the counselor agrees it would be in his or her best interest. The birth parent's readiness for the meeting would be screened in advance.

We are looking for families who would be willing to meet, on a first name basis only, with this birth parent once or twice before the placement. After placement they would build a relationship through letters and pictures exchanged through an intermediary and be open to a once-a-year meeting.

Would you be open to an initial meeting with this birth parent and to this level of cooperation afterwards **if you felt positive about her after the first meeting?**

Adoption Teamwork of Oregon

Jeanne Etter, Ph.D., Consultant, Mediator

85444 Teague Loop · Eugene, OR 97405 · (503) 342-2692

"What to Expect When You Get the Phone Call"

Suggested Questions for Prospective Adoptive Parents.

Use these questions as a guide when you receive a call saying you have been chosen by a birth parent for a possible adoption. **Please keep this form handy.**

1. How old is the child(ren)?

2. What are the potential risks? What are the major problem areas?

3. What are the health needs/risks for the child(ren)?

4. What is the birth mother like? What is her situation?

5. What is the birth father like? What is his situation?

6. What other family members are involved? Are they supportive?

7. Why is the parent planning an adoption?

8. What are some of the parent's values? Why did they choose us(me)?

9. Will we meet the birth father or mother? Do they want an agreement for letters or pictures or a meeting once a year?

10. What kind of expenses should we expect now and after the adoption?

AGREEMENT FOR POST-ADOPTION COMMUNICATION
(Short Form)

This Agreement is made between_____, the birth_____ of a child _____, born _____ and _____ and _____, the adoptive parents.

A. We understand the law views adoption as the irrevocable severance of all parental rights of the birth parents with respect to the adopted child(ren).

B. We understand that to all legal purposes the adopted child(ren) shall be the child(ren) of the adoptive parents the same as if born to them.

C. We are committed to a relationship which is supportive of the child(ren)'s needs, now and in the future, and understand that these needs may change.

Recognizing the above, and in recognition of the birth parent's freely given relinquishment for adoption, the parties agree as follows:

1.0 COMMUNICATION:_____ _____and_____ and _____ _____ agree to maintain communication through _____while the child(ren) is a minor.

1.1 Each person agrees to keep _____ intermediary informed of their current address. _____ and _____ agree to cover the cost of intermediary services.

1.2 _____and_____agree to provide _____ with a letter and a picture at least once a year around _____.

1.3 _____and_____agree to allow the child(ren) to send and receive letters from _____ .

1.4 _____ and _____ agree to keep _____ informed of serious illness or accident, or death of the minor child(ren).

2.0 MODIFICATION: The parties understand that they can make informal changes in these plans when they all agree but that this Agreement cannot be changed except in writing, signed by all parties. Parties are encouraged to revise this Agreement through cooperative process as the child(ren)'s needs change over the years.

9.

3.0 INVALIDATION: If _____ assumes an adversarial relationship with _____ and _____ (except in regard to enforcement of this agreement), _____ and _____ will no longer have to honor this Agreement.

4.0 EFFECTIVE DATE: This Agreement shall be effective when all the parties have signed below or when the child is placed with adoptive parents, whichever occurs later. All parties have been advised to have this Agreement reviewed by their own attorney before signing.

5.0 PARTIES: Children's Services Division of Oregon is not a party to this Agreement and has no responsibility for enforcement of it.

6.0 ENFORCEMENT: This Agreement _____ be presented purusant to ORS 109.305 for approval to the court where the adoption petition is pending. If any dispute arises over compliance with this Agreement, the parties agree to attempt mediation to resolve that dispute. If mediation is unsuccessful so that a civil action is necessary, the prevailing party shall be paid by the other party for all reasonable attorney fees, including those resulting from an appeal to any appellate court.

The parties below agree to honor the spirit, intent and terms of this Agreement:

_____ Date _____

_____ Date _____

_____ Date _____

This Agreement by the above parties has been reviewed, judged to be in the child's best interest and approved by:

_____ Date _____

for Children's Services Division of Oregon, Name and Title

AGREEMENT FOR POST-ADOPTION COMMUNICATION
(Long Form)

This Agreement is made between _____, the birth_____ of a child _____, born _____ and _____ and _____, the adoptive parents.

A. We understand the law views adoption as the irrevocable severance of all parental rights of the birth parents with respect to the adopted child(ren).

B. We understand that to all legal purposes the adopted child(ren) shall be the child(ren) of the adoptive parents the same as if born to them.

C. We are committed to a relationship which is supportive of the child(ren)'s needs, now and in the future, and understand that these needs may change.

Recognizing the above, and in recognition of the birth parent's freely given relinquishment for adoption, the parties agree as follows:

1.0 MEETINGS: _____shall have the right to meet with [the child(ren) and] _____ and _____ in a neutral and supervised setting at least once a year at the option and request of _____ and the convenience of the adoptive parents.

1.1 Transportation costs to the meetings will be_____. _____ and _____ will cover any cost of counseling and supervising the yearly meeting.

1.2 Missing a meeting does not entitle the person to any additional meetings.

2.0 COMMUNICATION: _____and_____ and _____ agree to maintain communication through _____while the child(ren) is a minor:

2.1 Each person agrees to keep _____ intermediary informed of their current address. _____ and _____ will cover the cost of intermediary services.

2.2 _____and_____agree to provide _____ with a letter and a picture at least once a year around _____.

2.3 _____and_____agree to allow the child(ren) to send and receive letters from _____ .

2.4 _____ and _____ agree to keep _____ informed of serious illness or accident, or death of the minor child(ren).

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for Children's Services Division of Oregon, Name and Title

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About the Author

Jeanne Etter, Ph.D., the Director of Teamwork for Children in Eugene, Oregon, is internationally recognized as an author, speaker, and trainer in child welfare mediation and adoption. Dr. Etter founded the Institute for Mediation in Child Welfare in 1995 as an outgrowth of her work with Oregon's Cooperative Adoption Mediation Project (CAMP), which she designed and implemented. She is a Technical Assistant for the National Resource Center for Permanency Planning at Hunter College in New York City and is a trainer of specialized child welfare mediators. Her other works include two books, numerous articles for national and international publications, and several book chapters.

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